

THE OTHER MAN'S WIFE

Frank
Richardson

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THE OTHER MAN'S WIFE

BY FRANK RICHARDSON

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LOVE AND ALL ABOUT IT

THERE AND BACK

THE SECRET KINGDOM

THE BAYSWATER MIRACLE

THE KING'S COUNSEL

SEMI-SOCIETY

THE MAN WHO LOST HIS PAST





The Other Man's Wife

By
Frank Richardson



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To
My Friend
R. H.

*Stolen waters are sweet, and bread eaten
in secret is pleasant, but he knoweth not
that the dead are there, and her guests
are in the depths of hell.* PROVERBS

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The Other Man's Wife

CHAPTER I

"THE BEAUTIFUL MRS. AINSLIE"

"THIS is the sweetest thing you have ever written to me."

An affectation of amused bewilderment was the young man's answer to her pause.

As he lay on the sofa, his eyes opened. But they seemed, if they expressed anything, to express entire absence of mind.

"You know what I mean," she said.

Then she drew from her bodice a small piece of folded paper. "You know now," she persisted, walked to the sofa, sat down by his side, and read:—

"MY DARLING,—By all means.—Who kisses your eyes?—RICHARD."

She looked at him tenderly, confident in his love, and seeking only some slight formal appreciation from him. But he made no reply.

"Isn't it sweet?" she asked, intent on exciting his interest.

"You like it?"

She drew away from him for a second, as she said affectionately and without any suggestion of criticism:

"It isn't often that I get a really perfect letter from

you. But this is delightful. This *means* you. It's businesslike, but it's kind . . . it's *you*."

Gwendolen hung upon her pleasure in the note.

The young man, smiling, stroked the back of her neck with a familiarly caressing action.

Then he rose, and walked to the mantelpiece, with the long, swinging stride that was characteristic of him. He turned to the table on which were sandwiches, a carafe of whisky, a syphon of soda-water, and a crystal jug of lemonade. He handed her a glass of lemonade. He poured out some whisky and soda, and, in doing so, caught sight of his reflection in the mirror.

"I am feeling terribly tired, dear."

"Come and sit down," she said, patting the sofa with a slim white hand.

He sat by her side.

For a moment he was silent, as he gazed in placid content at the luxury of his surroundings. The decoration of the library had been Gwendolen's own idea. On the walls were panels of untanned cowhide, studded with dull brass nails, set in dead-black oak. A huge copper lantern hung from one of the oaken rafters, shedding a warm red and yellow glow on the leather. The solitary bookcase contained only forty books, each in a binding appropriate to its contents. From the mass of her reading Gwendolen had, a year or two ago, selected these volumes as suitable to all possible moods in her life. These forty should be "Immortals" for her. She had chosen the books simply for her own satisfaction, so her selection was in a great degree indicative of her temperament. By the side of "Pride and Prejudice" stood "The Decay of Lying," the original manuscript for which she had paid 150 guineas. One was in a binding of vellum, the other of jade-green leather.

From the Old Testament she had selected the love-poem of Solomon and his "Wisdom," a slender volume of rose-pink. Next to it was a superb *édition-de-luxe* of Swinburne. From Balzac she had chosen "Cousin Bette" and "Cousin Pons," "Splendeurs et Misères des Courtisanes" and "Père Goriot." "The Bab Ballads," in a jewelled binding, was next to a couple of early works by Henry James. Then came one book of Huysmann's and three by Renan. Then "Richard Yea and Nay" followed by "Magdalen's Husband," "The Man Who Lost His Past," "Virginibus Puerisque," and "The Maxims of Father Faber." Kipling was represented by a volume of verse, and a book of Indian stories. Of history, theology, or travel there was no trace. The other volumes were as various in character as those enumerated. She had snatched from literature such spoils as were suited to the taste of the woman she believed herself to be.

On occasions she had erred, had found that an alleged friend was really an unfortunate acquaintance—in one case an intolerable bore. Such volumes she had displaced; they had made admirable wedding gifts approved by their recipients.

The walls were pictureless. On the parquet floor lay a few Eastern rugs, soft and heather-red. The harmonies of the room were so skilfully arranged that in all temperatures its own temperature seemed exactly normal.

There was absolute quiet in Green Street.

He felt that her eyes were fixed on his face. He turned and looked at her.

He noticed the wonderful growth of her black hair, hair that tenderly draped the brow on which it nestled. The white of her forehead was illumined by yellow-

brown eyes, soft yet severe, expressive of her most notable characteristic—fixity of purpose. Under her eyes were strongly marked lines of violet, which gave a certain mysticism to her expression. This violet colouring might have implied slight weariness or sorrow. But, in her case, he knew that this was not so. Whatever the shadows meant, they were prophetic rather than descriptive. The warm, full lips seemed almost an unnatural crimson in a delicate oval of white and pink, satin and rose petals. There was a silvery gleam on her skin. Her neck was well set on gracefully sloping, opalescent shoulders, and, in her figure, he saw dainty suggestions rather than crude statements of facts. She was exquisitely dressed. As she rose suddenly with energetic grace from the sofa and moved away from him sinuously in her black spangles, he remarked how suavely over the perfect curves fell the rustling triumph of the dressmaker. Tall though she was, she possessed the dainty charm generally associated only with little women, a fact which had been brought out in a brilliant picture of her by William Nicholson.

She stood by the mirror, stroking with her hands the shining waves of hair on the sides of her head, and looking at his reflection in the glass.

“My dear Richard, if you are too tired to talk, surely you are too tired to think. At any rate, I am too tired to watch you thinking about anybody but me.”

Then she turned round directly, smiling at him.

He rose from the sofa, and walked to her side, fascinated and revived by her supple beauty.

“I am awfully sorry, dear, but I have been working hard to-day. I ought not to have gone to the theatre with you.”

"You have been working hard all day," she said, as she put her hands on his shoulders, "and you have made five guineas, is it? People who are underpaid are always paid in guineas. There is something more dignified in receiving a hundred guineas than in making a million pounds."

He laughed with no sign of weariness.

"I think I have made about eight guineas, partly in the Whitechapel County Court, partly at the Old Bailey, and . . . I have drawn an advice on evidence."

"And now my darling is tired. I've paid a big price for your eight guineas."

It pained her to think that his work should absorb him to the point of leaving no enthusiasm for her society.

The two had been to see the first production of a new piece. They had witnessed a tedious play, during which Richard said nothing to relieve the monotony. In the *entr'acte*, which she had hoped to find the most interesting part of the production, he had left her side, and she had felt no little annoyance in watching him, at the entrance of the stalls, talking with animation to people of eminence, prominent solicitors, leading King's Counsel, newspaper proprietors, and persons whose friendship was of value to him—people to whom she had introduced him. The fact that many friends spoke to her with unmistakable admiration as they passed or sat down for a chat in his empty seat afforded her no satisfaction.

He was a struggling barrister. But need he be perpetually struggling? Success is of all characteristics the one that a woman most admires in a man. But the methods by which it is attained are seldom interesting to the woman. And it was particularly

galling to Gwendolen that Richard would leave her at a moment's notice to pursue any trivial course which should advance him one hair's breadth in his career.

And now, when they were alone, he was inanimate from the labours of the day. For an instant she felt irritated at the strength that showed itself so conspicuously in his smooth brown hair, the almost aggressive cut of his chin, the brilliant dark blue eyes, the sinuous and nervous hands, and the vigorous set of his shoulders.

That her rival in his affection was, she knew, his own profession, and not another woman, detracted little from the bitterness of the rivalry. She was well aware that his profession formed the major portion of his life. This she had always known, and her every act, since she had won his love, had been to press him towards success—to increase thereby the attractions of her rival . . . and perhaps to gain some additional gratitude towards herself.

He had made up his mind that he would reach eminence as a barrister, and she felt that the surest way to secure her happiness was to further him in his efforts in that direction.

His hand sought his watch. He was going.

"Don't trouble, dear," she said, "it is half-past twelve."

To yield in small things is a convention in the art of love: so she added:

"Before you go, I have something to tell you—something of importance. It is not about myself: it is about you. Can you wait?"

Putting his arm round her waist, he said:

"I should prefer it to be something about you, Gwendolen."

"Nonsense," she answered. "Give me five minutes and be good. Sit down on the sofa. You know that talking about you gives me far more pleasure than talking about myself. You can't accuse me of egotism, can you?"

"You and I are partners. You have done everything in the world to help me. You discovered in me merits that I shall never possess until I am too old to use them. It has been awfully sweet of you, Gwen. But, you know, love, like any other religion, demands certain sacrifices of the intellect, doesn't it?"

"Don't moralise, dear. I really have something to say to you—something that may be of great importance. Last night I was dining with Sir Thomas Clutterbuck, and there were lots of legal people present. After dinner, two barristers, Counsel to the Treasury or something, were talking mysteriously to one another. I caught a wave of conversation that somehow drifted to me. They were talking about this horrible Yoghi case."

"By Jove, that's a cheery drawing-room topic!" commented Richard.

"It is the only topic that is talked about in drawing-rooms just now. So much of the evidence is left out in the newspaper reports that we have to fill it in over the tea-tables. Everybody in the country is curious to know what were the precise offences committed by the Yoghi and Priscilla."

"But, after all, these people have not been convicted yet."

"On the contrary," replied Gwendolen, "they have been found guilty by every newspaper in England—they have been sentenced by every Anglo-American journal in London."

"The portraits of the Yoghi that I've seen are tantamount to a previous conviction."

"Of course, but these two legal harpies were lamenting with a kind of ghoulisn enthusiasm the fact that the prey cannot really be killed. It seems that there is some sort of flaw, do you call it?—in the indictment, and that if these terrible people could afford to have themselves defended they would get off."

"That's absurd," said Richard. "Of course, they're guilty."

She smiled, but she smiled with intention.

"I wish you would take a more professional view of the matter. I imagine these men know something about it; one, I think, is a Counsel in the case. I suppose, Richard, you are not the only barrister who takes the trouble to read his briefs."

"Very interesting, dear, very interesting. Good-night."

He had the rare gift of saying unpleasant things pleasantly.

"Is it possible that you don't understand? This is the great chance of your lifetime."

"In what way?" he asked, staring at vacancy with analytical eyes.

"In the simplest of all possible ways! You must go to some solicitor; you must tell him to take up the case; and he must instruct you to appear at the Old Bailey."

"My dear, I can't do that sort of thing."

"Here is the chance of your lifetime," she persisted. "You can get these people off. Of course, they are hideously, horribly, revoltingly guilty, and if you can bring about their acquittal—and you can—you will be the most-talked about man in England."

Though she spoke very earnestly, he turned away.

"Ah!" she smiled. "I know I have said the wrong thing. I know that you belong to the strictest Trades Union in the country." She held his face in her hands as she continued: "You are all ridiculously puffed up with pride. And what are you barristers, after all? Merely the maids-of-all-work to the Goddess of Justice. And half the time you get in her way and prevent her doing the slightest good. What's your own personal objection to a huge advertisement? Of course, you're right in theory. But in practice, no man can live without advertisement to-day."

He remained firm.

"Such a thing is out of the question. I can't dream of it."

"I want you to understand what the result of your success in this case would be."

"Oh," he said, "I understand perfectly. You know that I'm getting on fairly well, thanks in a very, very large extent to you, dear, and for that I'm very grateful . . . but it's slow work."

Then she became petulant:

"You are grateful to me for what I've done for you, and I am glad, with all my heart, that you've let me do it. But now I am asking you to do something for yourself which you would let *me* do for you, if I could; but, you see, I can't. For some insane reason, for some mediæval respect for effete institutions, you will not do it yourself. I am your partner, am I not?"

"In what?" he asked, well knowing the answer.

"In everything, I hope." Her face was mobile with the enthusiasm of her love as she continued: "I do the social side, the work that is suitable for a woman to do, and it is my greatest pleasure to contribute in the

least bit to your future success. You are going to be a success, and you know it. And I should know very little about you, indeed, if I were not firmly convinced that success—astounding success—is the great desire of your life.”

He moved towards her, but she interpreted his movement correctly.

“No,” she said, “I know what you are going to say. You are going to say that I am the great object of your life; but I am not. I know that success is vital to your happiness, and that in the case of all men there is no possibility of lasting love—even when the man and the woman are not married and have that chance in their favour—unless it’s set in an atmosphere of contentment. In a man’s life, love is an extra; in a woman’s—if she loves at all—it is a necessity. Though this has been said before, it is still true. If you are disappointed in your ambition, you will be disappointed in me. You may never blame me, but you will be dissatisfied with me. Here is a splendid chance for you. Richard, take my advice, and arrange for this defence.”

He did not trouble to argue; he simply said:—

“My dear, you don’t understand. The thing is impossible! It is unprofessional.”

His lips shut tightly, and from long experience of his moods Gwendolen felt that to insist further would be useless.

“You are very foolish,” she answered, “very, very foolish. I am only two years older than you, and yet I am afraid it will be ten years before you will ever learn as much worldly wisdom as I had ten years ago.”

“Were you very worldly-wise at twenty-two?”

She thought for a moment, and then said:—

"I have always understood that the art of life lay in getting exactly what one wanted."

"Well, I shall not do this," was his answer.

"We shall see," she replied.

However, he smiled, but she saw that he was not to be moved.

"I give in," she said with a suddenness surprising to him, for in most things she had hitherto had her way, and he could not remember that he had ever found her in the wrong. She put her hands on his broad shoulders—as she looked at the face of the man she loved. His short brown hair had in it just a ripple that shone in the light. It grew thickly in a manner indicative of strength, suggestive of vast energy, difficult to disarrange, fitting, it seemed, tightly to his temples, which were singularly white. She gazed in admiration at the square-cut forehead, the straight, strong eyebrows that, when he frowned, almost met over his clear blue eyes, the firmly-cut nose, slender and slightly too long, with nervous nostrils. Then, from her point of view, the face deteriorated. The upper lip was too long. The mouth was thin, and might have been regarded as almost passionless—by anyone but her. His teeth were square and white. And the chin—she had admitted that she hated it. She had accused him of having an old chin on a young face, and he could make no defence. Having completed her examination of his features, she put up her lips to be kissed.

"You'll be a wonderful old man—a frightening old man. I don't think I shall like you when you're an old man."

"I must risk that," he laughed.

"But the main point is that you will love me always, as you do now, only more, won't you?"

"Yes, always and always, darling," he answered as he moved aside a sapphire and diamond pendant to kiss her.

The doors of the library opened, and there entered a small, lank man of fifty, with thin legs that shambled along as though with difficulty supporting the weight of the rest of his frame. His pale, almost yellow face was graven with deep lines, suggestive of ill-health; his prominent, straight nose was almost transparent; his mouth was weak without being sensitive; he had a curious habit of passing his tongue rapidly across his lips, like a ferret licking the blood of slaughtered chickens. Prematurely bald, tufts of grey hair grew upon arid places on his head and in his ears. He had a vague, straggling, grey moustache. Prominent were his black eyes, and circled by reddish rims; his cheekbones were protuberant; he was smoking an immense cigar. He wore gold spectacles.

The only son of "Jake" Ainslie, sometime Mayor of Manchester in the flourishing forties, he had been sent to Rugby and to Oxford.

"Jake," a pioneer in many things, had been among the first of the north country cotton-spinners to grasp the fact that the elimination of a Lancashire accent was not fatal to companionable qualities. But Wilfred at Oxford—Wadham, alas!—had not shown any symptoms of parts or of promise. He had done nothing. He had known nobody.

When—during his last year in residence—his father had died, leaving him an income of £15,000 a year, he came definitely to the conclusion that London, not Manchester, was the capital of England. London was the place to live in. His innate north country instinct had led him to believe that cotton-spinning was not

the most secure of industries. Therefore, he disposed of the business on admirable terms at the best possible moment. But he remained in touch with his Manchester friends. He consulted them, not one or two, but five or six or seven, as to his investments. They gave him their best advice, for his father's sake. And the best advice of a Manchester man, respected in Manchester circles, where respect is hard of gaining, is the best financial advice in the world. As a result, he had for many years enjoyed an income of from eighteen to twenty-eight thousand a year.

His wife he chose himself, without consulting Manchester. Being rich and earnestly ugly, he would have made an ideal husband to many Manchester girls.

Manchester never forgave him his marriage with Gwendolen Paxton-Pryce, a name absolutely unknown in Manchester.

With a movement of genial hospitality Mr. Ainslie crossed the parquet floor. A slight slip on a sliding rug marred the effect of his entrance.

"Had bad luck," said Wilfred, "had bad luck; I've been playing bridge whist at the club all the evening, and made precisely £2 6s."

A burst of coughing interrupted him. He then succeeded in jerking out, "Very good of you to take my wife to the theatre, Richard—really very good of you. Fearful waste of time! You ought to be reading your briefs, you know. When you're my age you can go to the theatre with a pretty woman, and then, by gad, you will have too much sense to do it."

Richard said good-night to the husband and wife, and went out of the house.

CHAPTER II

A HOME IN BAYSWATER

HE turned out into the street, and decided to walk home, partly from economy, which had long been a natural and necessary habit of his, and partly because, tired though he was, he felt a desire to draw up some sort of mental balance-sheet of his position.

The night was fine under a dull blue sky. Passing the Marble Arch with its flaming coffee-stall, he walked westward in the shadow of the trees.

In spite of the conditions of chronic and irritating impecuniosity in which he lived, he considered that his fortunes were taking a turn for the better.

His time was fully occupied with slightly-paid work on his own behalf, and gratuitous work on behalf of other barristers. But his practice and his experience had increased considerably during the last four years, and he felt that he was justified in believing himself capable of conducting, single-handed, any such cases as could fall to the lot of a junior.

His knowledge of law was varied and sound. He possessed just as much eloquence as is, in the eyes of an English jury, compatible with candour and honesty of purpose. Hitherto he had progressed by reason of energy and perseverance—and the assistance of Mrs. Ainslie. But now he felt that his career was ripe for the arrival of luck; he was ready for luck; its advent would not find him unprepared or inefficient. One

single stroke of good fortune, and he might walk steadfastly on the highroad to a large junior-practice in the King's Bench Division; after that might follow a silken gown, Parliament, and, perhaps, a great career.

These were hazardous prospects. He had no assurance of the future. But in the present he possessed an absorbing delight—his absolute adoration of Gwendolen.

Not only was his life ordered with strict method, but until he had met Mrs. Ainslie he had firmly believed that his heart was completely under control of his sense of expediency.

He had up till then considered that, to conduct his career with absolute satisfaction to himself, it must be the work of his own hands and his own brain. He had wished for no other help.

When his position should be assured, he would marry; until such time he would regard the society of women as a distraction, futile at best, and—at worst—disastrous.

In this condition of mind he had three years ago met Mrs. Ainslie, a woman moving in a phase of society to which he was a stranger—a woman surrounded by all the graces and refinements of wealth that exercise so strong a fascination over a poor man.

Almost at their first meeting they had found in each other the natural and necessary complement of their lives.

For three years there had been no disturbing element in their affection. Each had loved the other with complete surrender and complete confidence. In all matters of importance she was delighted to find that he asked her advice, and it was a source of great pleasure to him that her advice was so shrewd—containing, as

it did, a soothing flattery of himself, and a spur to effort that should raise him still higher in her eyes.

With admirable adroitness she contrived to bring his name to the notice of such solicitors as she met, and, little as the reflection in truth pleased him, he understood that he owed to her a very considerable portion of the moderate success which he had hitherto attained.

With this somewhat slight reservation, he was completely happy in his love, for he was in love with his best friend.

Taking his latchkey out of his pocket, he opened a drab door in Gloucester Terrace, which is, or is not, Bayswater, according as you live, or do not live, there. The tidy poverty of his home struck him in unpleasant contrast to the picturesque affluence of Green Street.

He went up to his room. On his mantelpiece he found evidence of his mother's hands in the rearrangement of the few ornaments and the note that she never omitted to place there when he was dining out, asking him, in case of his leaving the house early, to be sure and come into her bedroom, and some slight message of affection.

At eight o'clock the next morning he went down to her bedroom. The old lady welcomed him with a smile and a look of pride at the strong form and the keen eyes of a man in perfect health, strenuous for work.

With a thin hand she drew his head down to kiss her cheek. It was a beautiful head that lay on the pillow, a head with its clear-cut but somewhat weak profile and high forehead suggestive of proud maternity. Curtained about her face was luxuriant white

hair. The hair was strong, like her son's, and in no sense indicative of a worn-out frame.

Fifty-eight years old, she made no struggle against the passage of time. Though of an age when many another woman, the pseudo-woman of fashion, for instance, is entering into her second girlhood, Lady Meyville did not attempt to combine the fictitious appearance of youth with the genuine signs of decay. The art of being a graceful old lady is perhaps the crowning success of a woman's life.

She was the widow of Sir Theodore Clifton Meyville, who had been knighted for a mistake made by him in Uganda. Many other functionaries of the Colonial Office had obtained K.C.M.G.'s for mistakes only slightly graver than his. A disappointed man, he died at his residence in Gloucester Terrace, Hyde Park, and left behind him Montague "Cliftonville," the eminent actor, Richard, and Ethel. His children were endowed with a considerable share of those good looks which had enabled their father to reach a position totally unfitted to his absolute incompetence. His life's work left his widow in possession of an income of £250.

She asked her son a few questions about his engagement of the night before. He answered, not altogether easily, with the stereotyped *alibi* which it had always been his practice to employ.

He had dined, he said, at the New University Club.

His frequent attendance at this institution was the only point at which his mother came at all into contact with his affection for Mrs. Ainslie, but it was never without a feeling of uneasiness that Richard repeated this necessary lie.

After a pause she spoke.

"Richard, I want to speak to you about something."

The hesitation in her voice showed him that the topic was one that she hated to broach, and, from the confidence in which the two lived, he knew that the topic must be of a financial nature.

With a tender smile, he patted her little waxen hand: "I hope it is not—very much, mother."

"Well, you see, the fact of the matter is this: Ethel must go to Court."

"Good heavens, what for?"

He was astounded at so extravagant a proposition from so evenly-balanced a woman.

"That is not your own idea."

A movement of her lips framed an affirmative answer—framed it as a sort of ashamed confession of weakness.

"I wish you would only act on your own ideas, mother. They are always better than other people's."

"No, dear; it is only right that Ethel should be presented."

"But," he argued, "we do not move in Court circles. We are living in Bayswater. The King does not require Ethel's presence in his *entourage*."

"But it gives her a certain position," persisted Lady Meyville, conscious that she had a weak case.

"A position of what sort?" he asked. "The only position it gives is to people who slip through the Lord Chamberlain's office by the skin of their teeth. If there is something against you, and the world of fashion knows it, I daresay a presentation is a sort of verdict of 'Not Guilty.' But if nothing is known of you at all, you can always appear at Court. Is the Lord Chamberlain to investigate the *canards* and scandals of Tulse Hill and Peckham Rye and Ponder's End?"

"I knew what you would say," said his mother, "but I should so much like to see Ethel in a drawing-room dress."

"And have her photographed on a staircase with a view of Windsor Castle in the background, and a couple of columns out of perspective at each side! What does it mean?" he repeated, walking about the room. "It only means that the girl is not notorious, and that the parents have money to throw away." And then he said shortly, "Of course, it is merely a question of money. If we had money, or if I had money, you could do what you liked. We always get the greatest pleasure out of our least sensible wishes."

"Never mind, dear, I daresay you're right," she answered, as though closing the matter.

"How much would it cost?" he asked, prepared to do his best.

"It could not be done for less than thirty guineas." He shrugged his shoulders.

"It is impossible. I simply haven't got the money. Why not go to Montague?"

"Oh, I don't think that Montague can spare it. He is so generous. I see by *The Morning Post*," she said, "that he has given a hundred guineas to the Lord Mayor's Fund. I don't think that we could possibly ask Montague for it."

With a feeling of irritation tinged with contempt Richard turned away.

"It seems strange that he can give a hundred guineas to a charity, and cannot afford thirty for his own sister."

"But," she pleaded, "Montague has so many calls upon him."

"Oh, I know, I know. And the only calls he answers

are those that are advertised in the newspapers. The price of Ethel's dress will not appear in *Green Room Gossip*."

"You have no right to say that," she cried, always intolerant of any comment on her favourite son. "You know Montague is working very hard to get his knighthood, and his last two pieces have not been successes. You cannot expect him to do any more for us."

"Any more? What has he ever done? He gives you tickets for his theatre—when his piece is not doing well. But you can't keep your house going on free seats. Of course, he has got calls. But, then, what does he want to play *Hamlet* for?"

"My dear, you cannot expect to be knighted if you have not played *Hamlet*."

"I do not see why he wants to be knighted. You've got Braythorpe blood in your veins, and a knighthood would only put him on a level with the last Lord Mayor and the next advertising brewer. Even Hebrew financiers jib at being knighted now." Half-seriously he added, "The ignominy of being knighted killed my father."

"I am sorry to hear you speak like that."

"The greatest distinction a celebrated actor can have is to be officially converted into a nonentity."

Conscious though the mother was of her eldest son's limitations, yet she had schooled herself to believe with the public that all shortcomings possessed by actors are evidences of what is called the artistic temperament. She had not ignored his faults, but she regarded them as part of his personality and as characteristics of no little value to him in the profession in which he shone.

Glaring blemishes, exhibited by him in his capacity as a son, she minimised as being the natural attributes of an actor. She was blinded, in a certain degree, by the glamour of praise that Montague Cliftonville wore as a halo round his handsome head.

With business-like directness, Richard, his hand on his watch, said:—

“It is out of the question for me to provide the money. It is possible that Montague can do it. At any rate, it is right that he should have the privilege of——”

With a humorous twinkle in her eye, Lady Meyville supplied the word “refusing.”

Richard answered as he moved to the door, “He has no business to, but I will go to the theatre some time to-day and give him the chance.”

Then quite seriously his mother interjected,

“Oh, *please* do not say anything to worry him!”

After breakfast Richard went off to the Temple.

CHAPTER III

THE PALL MALL THEATRE

AT four o'clock Richard was in his chambers at Essex Court, having completed a short and unremunerative day's work.

There were no consultations fixed for that afternoon, so he decided to go to the Pall Mall Theatre and see his brother. As it was Wednesday, he knew there would be a *matinée*.

While walking westwards along the Strand he overtook Sir James Tufnell, the popular hanging judge. Immensely tall, with a striding gait and wearing an habitual and almost lethal frown, Sir James's was an unmistakable figure. To his great pleasure, Richard heard his name pronounced by the judge, who took his arm. He complimented the young man on his "success," and complained bitterly of the decadence of the Bar since his day. It is a curious fact that many judges have noticed that the total absence of ability in the Bar (which no one deplores more than they) synchronises with their own elevation to the Bench.

"By the bye, a charming woman was talking to me about you the other night. She says you're the coming man. How the devil does she know, eh?"

"Who was she, Sir James?"

"A Mrs. Ainslie, a beautiful woman with the profile that the American man, Gibson, invented. Is she an American?"

"No. But all women who are handsome are supposed to be American, in the same way that all men who are successful are said to have Jewish blood in their veins."

Sir James's features relaxed into a grim stare, the nearest approach to a smile of which they were capable.

"That's right, Meyville. Be admired by beauty. Do not admire it too much, and you will go far. Now I shall take a hansom, and I will drive you to the Carlton."

Richard was very pleased at being asked to drive with the judge.

"I'm not going to the Athenæum," Sir James said, when they were in the cab. "I can't stand it. I went into the card-room the other day, and it was like a cripples' home—nothing but octogenarians on scaffolding. Also, they are going to construct a special lift for invalid chairs. Would you stand it? No."

It was a habit of his to ask violent questions and supply indignant answers.

"Listen," he suddenly said, assuming his usual "The sentence of the court is . . ." frown. "Never give advice. Numskulls at all hours of the day put absurd propositions to lawyers. Send all numskulls to the devil. Only last night, at a dinner-party, a dolt bored me for an hour by giving me the history of an impossible legal complication. I told him my opinion. And then the dolt said he would consult his lawyer! Lawyer! If you met a surgeon at dinner, would you ask him then and there to operate for appendicitis? Damned if you would."

The sinister old man prattled on. But for his extraordinary fondness for depopulation, he would have been a very pleasant companion.

"There's another numskull," said he, as they passed the Charing Cross Theatre. "That actor objects to his theatre being called a place of business. The case came before me. Good heavens, what are the actors coming to? Clowning is an art, and, also, a profession! It can't be both. I suppose they'll call it a religion next. Another fellow—quite the best of 'em, too—produced *Julius Cæsar*. Not content with that, he adorned London with an advertisement of a Roman coin bearing the date B.C. 45. Do you suppose the Roman mint knew of the coming of Christ and dated this coin accordingly? I doubt it. By the bye, your brother is a mountebank of some sort, isn't he?"

"My brother is Montague Cliftonville."

"Cut him off with a shilling. Your name's not good enough for him. Good enough for a barrister, not good enough for a barn-stormer! Is that sense? Far from it."

"He doesn't act in a barn," laughed Richard. "He's just taken the lease of a new——"

"Yes, I know, a huge Byzantine barn, confound him! Actors are like burglars: they always change their names for business purposes. Do they or do they not? Of course they do."

"It's very fortunate that some people change their names."

"Fortunate? Why?"

"Otherwise everybody would be called Adam, which would be confusing."

"That's no excuse," grunted the judge.

"You're very down on the stage, Sir James."

"Didn't you know that I married an actress? Thank God, I've been a widower for forty years, but I haven't got over it yet."

Richard made no defence. He knew that the judge had been unhappy in his married life.

From his knowledge of actors he found it difficult to make a convincing defence of the stage. He knew that the stage was the Cinderella of the arts. He knew that whenever things were slack in the journalistic world an attack would be made on the stage. His position in discussing things theatrical was rendered the more difficult owing to the conspicuous and notorious vanity of his brother. He had never been able to conceal from himself the fact that Montague Cliftonville had made a sort of corner in vanity. But Montague had introduced him to many actors who were men of the world, and who, in the society of men of the world, shone by reason of their ripe judgment and shrewd intelligence. He appreciated, as perhaps few people did appreciate, the struggle that had been made by the superior class of actor to shake off the grotesque glamour of ridiculous publicity which surrounded the heads of certain charlatans of the stage. The earnest actor, the brilliant actor, the actor deserving of support from the artistically-minded, did not write grotesque letters to the papers; he did not lend himself to advertisements of washes for the mouth or restorers for the hair. He was every bit as much an artist in his profession as was a Royal Academician or a King's Counsel. The Barnum element introduced within the last few years had brought contempt on an honourable profession struggling for recognition. But if an artist turned his body into a hoarding for the advertisement either of himself or of a patent medicine, he ceased to be an artist.

Montague was a human hoarding.

"Sir James," he said, "in everybody who makes a

success in life, from Cæsar to Napoleon and—may I say it?—you, there is always something theatrical in the temperament. Unless you play to the gallery, the gallery will never realise that you are playing.”

Sir James threw a quick glance at him.

“And you are looking out for a gallery, are you? Of course you are. And I hope you’ll find it.”

They alighted at the Carlton Club. Sir James handed the cabman a shilling.

“’Ere, what’s this for?”

The judge raised his head and glowered at the man’s face.

“Beg pardon, mi Lord.”

He drove away.

“That fellow’s been in trouble. Everybody who’s been in trouble knows me.”

With his hand in Richard’s arm, Sir James walked up the steps. A middle-aged man of semi-Semitic appearance, in a tweed suit with a huge button-hole, brushed past him.

“Who’s that?” he asked severely of the commissioner.

“Mr. Fludyer-Seaton, Sir James.”

“The Member?”

“Yes, sir.”

Turning to Richard, he said:

“I believe that all our biggest criminals who are not in gaol are in Parliament. If only these modern financiers had a trades union they could pass a Bill abolishing the criminal law. And that fellow is a member of my club! Thirty years ago I was the only bounder in the place. Now the club is full of ’em. Good day to you.”

Sir James disappeared through the doors, and Rich-

ard crossed the street to Mr. Cliftonville's superb Byzantine Temple of Drama.

On reaching the stage door he found his way blocked by a singularly handsome actor, who appeared only in the last act of the play, and was asking for his letters.

He received an envelope addressed in a female handwriting, which Richard unconsciously noticed.

Mr. Marradyne (for it was indeed he) opened it carelessly, and then said with sorrow that had in it almost a note of holy sadness, "Oh, these little women! What can one do with them, Judkins? They take the life out of a fellow," and he moved on with his *billet-doux*. He possessed sufficient culture to employ the word *billet-doux*.

On Richard asking whether he could see Mr. Cliftonville, a wizened face appeared from a rabbit-hutch-like opening, took stock of the new-comer, and demanded:

"Have you an appointment?"

"No."

It appeared that a new custodian, who knew not Richard, had been installed in the place of the white-bearded veteran to whom he was accustomed.

"Then it is impossible to see him—absolutely impossible to see him," repeated the crumpled little man with all the pomposity of a War Office official intent on impeding the business of the country.

The quaint self-importance of the stage-doorkeeper amused Richard.

"You mean to say that it is beyond human power for me to see the manager?"

"Absolutely. It can't be done."

"But supposing it were a matter of importance; supposing that I had got a play with me?"

The stage-doorkeeper held up his hands in horror.

"Mr. Cliftonville's literary adviser is now in America."

"And in the absence of his literary adviser he is completely stranded, as it were? Is that it?"

"If you have got your play with you, you can leave it here," he answered brusquely.

"No, I have not got a play with me. I was only putting a case to you. But I am very anxious to see Mr. Cliftonville."

"Didn't I tell you it *couldn't* be done, not without an appointment? The thing *can't* be done."

"But supposing it were a matter of life and death?"

"You would have to make an appointment all the same," answered the stage-doorkeeper wearily.

"Would it be any good taking up my card?"

"Not the slightest; not the slightest. If you want a job you must 'write in,' the same as everybody else."

The clean-shaven face of his interrogator had convinced the little man that he was an actor in search of employment.

"Would you mind looking at my card first, and then you can decide whether to send it up or not?"

"Oh, I'll *look* at your card right enough; but it ain't no good, believe me."

Richard gave him a card, on which was printed, "Mr. Richard Meyville, 10 Essex Court, Temple."

The stage-doorkeeper scanned it and said, almost respectfully, "I thought you was a literary gent from the first. What do you want—pars or an interview? What is the name of your paper?"

"Would you mind taking that card up, or sending it up, or employing Mr. Cliftonville's dresser's assistant to undertake the office?"

After a considerable number of formalities the card was despatched; and in a few minutes the stage-door-keeper's ear was struck by a shout:

"'Ere, send the Guv'nor's brother up, and look sharp about it."

As Richard was disappearing through the white-washed passages, the little man muttered to himself:

"That's the first decent-looking relation I ever saw a first-class actor have! Lor! I thought he was an actor himself at first. I wish all these relations wouldn't change their names."

Richard was shown into the ante-room of the popular actor's dressing-room. With a pleasing fantasy it had been furnished like a Japanese tea-house.

After an interval of two or three minutes a delicate vision of pink and silver entered the room.

Of all the parts that Montague had ever played, in no one had he taken such pleasure as in the character of Charles Stuart, the young Pretender. He had never looked so superb, so graceful, or, incidentally, so manly.

As the brothers stood face to face, the actor appeared a glorified edition of the lawyer, a fact of which he was pleasantly conscious.

"A good make-up, isn't it?" said he; with a lace-ruffled hand he waved courteously to Richard.

As he approached him, the unbecoming light of day which shone through the windows dispelled the illusion, and, in his brother's eyes, the famous actor with his frescoed face instantly became of the kindred of those mountebanks who disport themselves at country fairs.

"I have only got a minute, Dick, old boy. What can I do for you, eh?" he said, with a hearty breeziness that he always assumed in the presence of men.

"Oh, you have got plenty of time for what I want; it is only a cheque for £30."

"What, for some Barristers' Benevolent Fund, eh? That is a good idea—a good idea," he said reflectively. "The Bar and the Stage is a more natural union than the union of the Church and the Stage. It's the same line of Art, eh?—the same line of Art. I was telling the Solicitor-General the other day that he would have made quite a decent actor but for his brogue."

The egoism of the man was so sincere that it was scarcely ludicrous.

"No," said Richard, "it is not for that."

And then he explained the purpose for which the money was required.

Montague strolled to the mantelpiece and assumed a semi-Shakespearean attitude.

There were moments when his pose seemed deliberately to suggest "The Bard," over whom he had lost so much of other people's money. He deliberately turned his profile to his brother. Indeed, in refusing favours it had always been his practice to give, in the alternative, a certain slight dividend of perfect beauty.

To actors applying for parts, to dramatists importunate for a hearing, to private applications for trifling loans, he never refused—his profile.

His brother watched him curiously.

"Mother is very anxious for the money."

"Yes, I know, I know. I am sure of it. But why should I be worried? Can't you understand when one is playing a part, eh—when one is soul-engrossed—soul-engrossed is the right phrase—one cannot be bothered in this way?"

"Of course, if you're hard up——"

The actor turned at the words, and resented them.

"Of course, I am not hard up; but my expenses are so great. Now *you* haven't got any expenses; why don't *you* do it?"

"My dear Montague, I can't afford to have expenses. All the money I get goes directly it comes, automatically."

He did not explain that the bulk of it went to Gloucester Terrace.

The assistant stage-manager entered the room reverently, and said:

"Mr. Cliftonville, third act, please."

"Well, I will see what I can do. I will send for my financial adviser, and let you know after the act. You wait here, or, rather, I will take you into Marradyne's dressing-room, and introduce you to him. You will like him; he is a wonderfully handsome fellow. He will understudy me in the next piece, but he doesn't know how to wear his clothes. Tell me what you think of him."

Montague spoke as though the whole art of acting consisted in the ability to wear clothes.

In the dressing-room Richard made the acquaintance of the handsome young man who suffered from women, and a younger actor who envied his occasions for suffering.

Marradyne welcomed him heartily and with great courtesy. He was making-up, and suggested that the visitor should watch the process carefully.

While doing so, Richard caught sight of the alleged letter from the fair admirer lying on the table; the handwriting was not to be mistaken, and the *billet-doux* ran thus:—

Messrs. Rowl and Berkeley, American Tailors.

To one gent's lounge suit.	£3	3	0
To one gent's fancy vest.		8	6
	£3	11	6

Having completed the work of Art, the actor turned round and said, "A blessing for me that I hardly have to make-up at all! Some of the actors who make-up handsome have really got faces like a sheet of paper. They can paint anything on it, but it takes 'em hours to do the painting; still, it is an advantage in one way, because, do what I will, I can't disguise myself. You would know me anywhere. It is a nuisance," he added, with an air of intense anguish; "I shall never be able to play anything but Romeo parts."

The specialty of the other actor consisted in coarse language. He punctuated his conversation with unnecessary adjectives and impossible adverbs, in the same way that a halting barrister interjects "Gentlemen of the jury" in his speeches.

Marradyne was evidently anxious to impress the manager's brother. He said:

"I don't know if you have ever noticed that duchesses always wear linen petticoats?"

"Really? You interest me enormously! Is that a fact?"

The younger actor gazed with open-eyed envy.

"Is that a fact, really?" Richard repeated. "Do you know it of your own knowledge, or has a Blue Book been issued on the subject?"

There was something in his tone that was not pleasing to Mr. Marradyne.

"Perhaps you do not move very much in the society of duchesses," he shot out.

"Personally, I only know duchesses as I know the Red Sea—by reputation."

"I thought I had never seen you about anywhere. You ought to go to some smart 'At Homes.' Then you'd know."

Richard was amused at the calibre of mind so proudly exhibited by this peculiar young man. It seemed to him that actors possessed all the failings of women, in addition to the more contemptible defects of men, and attained a social tone denied to either.

On those few occasions when he had mingled in the intimate life of the theatre it had struck him as one intolerable for any man with the instincts of a gentleman; it did not appear to him at all heroic that his brother should have risen from the ranks of such strange people to that position in which he took such great pleasure and pride.

He tried to maintain an intelligent conversation with Marradyne and the other until such time as Montague should be free, but he found that when these two were not talking about themselves, their agony was almost physical.

He tried them with kindred arts, with painting, with music, and with sculpture; but it was of no avail. Conversation came to a deadlock.

He took a bold course. He patted Marradyne on the back. Said he:

"When are we going to see *you* in management?"

The move was a success.

The actor's eyes sparkled.

"Well, old chap, I would go into management to-morrow if I could get a Romeo and Juliet of modern life. But we have no dramatists who understand the

actor. All they understand is the public. What do they know about Art? By Art, the actor reveals himself; but he can't do it unless the dramatists help him. If I want a coat, I don't go to a ready-made shop. I go to Poole, and I say, 'Poole, my boy, here am I, Vivian Marradyne. You know me. I know you. Make me a frock-coat that fits me like a glove.' And Poole does it every time. That is where tailors are so superior to dramatists. The tailor gives you what you want, and you supply the Art of wearing it. Isn't that true, old boy?"

"Yes; it is a great thought, finely expressed."

"You are quite sure you took my meaning?" asked the actor.

At this moment Montague's valet summoned Richard.

As he was leaving, the younger actor stopped him at the door.

"I should be awfully obliged if you would tell me what the Governor *really* thinks of me in this piece. He's said a lot of awfully nice things to fashionable people, friends of mine, about me, but perhaps he would tell you what he *really* thinks."

Richard, amused, answered:

"My brother and I never talk about theatrical matters. I don't understand them."

But the other persisted.

"You might just crab my scene. It's the prison scene. I'm the jailer. You might just say, 'Harry Coverdale seems to have fallen off a bit since he played fourth Roman citizen with Wilson Barrett.' You might say that."

"I should very much like to say that. Nothing would please me more; but I never saw you play any

sort of citizen with Wilson Barrett. I never saw Wilson Barrett. I know there was such an institution. He was the actor who made a corner in the Gospels, wasn't he? Or was it *Little Arthur's History of England?*"

"Oh, I thought everyone had seen me! Fourth Roman citizen was my best part. Anyhow, you might *say* that, you see, and then he would give you his real opinion. Mind you, even if he said that my 'Jailer' is not as perfect as my 'Fourth Citizen,' I shouldn't be cut up. As a matter of fact, I should know that it's the badness of the part. Because, all things considered, this is the most perfect thing I've ever done. And an artist naturally feels it when he is doing his best work."

"My brother," answered Richard, "is so aware how ignorant I am of the theatre that an exhaustive criticism on the respective merits of your 'Jailer' and your 'Citizen' would be wasted on him."

As he left the room, Marradyne said to his friend: "Devilish conceited fellow that, eh?"

And the other entirely agreed with him.

"Outside the profession," said he, "people are so narrow-minded."

"Except, of course, in Society," answered the beloved of women.

Montague received his brother in his dressing-room. At that moment he was examining a speech written by his oratorical adviser to be spoken next day at the meeting of the Actors' Benevolent Fund. It contained beautiful thoughts, beautifully expressed, to be delivered by a beautiful man.

"Good God," he said, "that will fetch 'em. But you haven't brought in the Greek quotation I wanted.

At any rate, see that it is handed to my press-agent so that it gets to the evening papers in time."

The man bowed and withdrew, while the financial adviser whispered to the principal.

Of all the advisers that Mr. Cliftonville found it necessary to employ, the financial adviser produced on the spectator the least suggestion of sound financial status—perhaps because, before obtaining his present exalted position, he had been a somewhat unsuccessful broker's man.

When the brothers were left alone, Richard found himself facing the profile. He knew the worst. He lost his temper.

"Good heavens!" he said, "can you do nothing without advisers? You are being ruined by advice. I believe you expressly charter incompetent people in order to recommend the wrong thing. If a man is a man, he can sometimes take the initiative himself. Your instinct must have told you that your last four plays would never succeed, and your stage-doorkeeper is an imbecile. You are surrounded by broken pegs in crumbling holes."

"What do you mean?" asked the actor, surprised. "This is the greatest triumph that I have ever had."

"You are on the stage longer than you have ever been, if you mean that. But the play can't run. And you know it. If you could be content to play parts you're fitted for, you would be making a lot of money. As it is, you're making straight for the Bankruptcy Court."

The manager murmured something about Art.

"Oh, nonsense; don't talk to me about Art. Art is only another name for advertisement. Let's come to

the point. Mother wants £30, and you have gone through some idiotic formalities with your financial adviser. I suppose you've consulted him about a family matter, and he has advised you not to give the money to your mother. Has he, or has he not?"

"I'm not accustomed to being spoken to like this."

The actor shrank under the indignation of his brother.

He stammered something about it being awkward—at any other time—and so on.

He felt that there were words which would effectually wipe out the affront, but the words had not been written for him by his oratorical adviser, and they were therefore not forthcoming.

Richard insisted.

"Write out the cheque."

"I can't now," he said; "my secretary has my cheque-book."

"Great Scott!" roared Richard, "you have enough formalities in this place to supply a Government office."

In a great flutter, the other exclaimed:

"All matters of mere detail must be kept out of the artist's life."

Pleased with the thought, he repeated it.

"But to-morrow," he added, "I will send off the cheque."

His dresser entered the room.

"Good-bye, Richard. I have only kept you waiting about in order to be sure that the money was really necessary. God bless you, my boy," he said, concluding the interview with a wonderfully simulated affectation of almost nautical heartiness.

Mr. Cliftonville was always a gentleman on the stage, and an actor off it.

From the words that he had overheard the dresser circulated the report that Mr. Cliftonville suffered from an impecunious brother, to whom he behaved with great liberality.

CHAPTER IV

A MOTHERS' MEETING

LADY MEYVILLE was "At Home" on the first and second Thursday in the month.

To-day, in the drawing-room, were three ladies, the most assiduous visitors at these afternoons.

Mrs. Paxton-Pryce, the mother of Gwendolen, was a massive, fair woman, with a face like a dissipated potato.

Of the same age as her hostess, she affected airs of incredible youth. Though dressed in an *outré* style, she had specialised in morality, and was regarded in her circle as an expert—a censorious expert—in the wickedness of Semi-Society, an environment to which she was, indeed, a complete stranger. The fact that a second cousin of hers had once figured in the Divorce Court, as a sort of honorary co-respondent, had established her moral position in Bayswater. As the mother of "the beautiful Mrs. Ainslie," she was considered the leading "Society" woman in the suburb. Incidentally, too, she was regarded as an authority on the human interior, chiefly by reason of the notoriously faulty digestive apparatus of her son-in-law, Mr. Ainslie.

Mrs. Bolitho, in her particular clique, represented Society in its higher form. Her generally acknowledged claim was based on the fact that she had once shaken hands at a Charity Bazaar with the Princess of Salmon von Gluckstein. This chance meeting had

altered the entire course of her life; she had, as it were, amalgamated the Princess with herself.

She had ceased to have opinions; but her conversation expressed those of the dear Princess. She could hold her own in those cosy chats about confinements, which are so popular at Bayswater and Surbiton teatable. Her figure resembled an old-fashioned pen-wiper, and her character was beyond reproach. She was not a beautiful woman. Neither, indeed, was Mrs. Pegram.

This lady was the wife of a small manufacturer of chocolate-boxes (a decaying industry in this country), and she lived at Smelhurst, an undesirable and almost inaccessible township on the South Eastern Railway. An angular woman, with a predatory nose, an unfortunate colour scheme, and dank hair. She possessed a taste in clothes that would surely make the angels weep. The colours of her dress suggested a rainbow that had gone mad.

She was the most regular of the attendants at Lady Meyville's "At Homes." Every Thursday being remnant day at Whiteley's, it was convenient for her to drop into Gloucester Terrace, after a piratical raid on the bargain-counters. She had a very keen instinct for the impossible, and scraps of ribbon and silk that were too glaring for Ashanti envoys or Zulu women were eagerly snapped up and despatched to Smelhurst.

To these ladies "Whiteley's" was a sort of club. There they met regularly in the morning, and discussed the most *recherché* diseases of the moment, and the little scandals that constituted the fashionable intelligence of the neighbourhood.

Agog with excitement at the proposed presentation, they were surrounding Ethel.

A tall, fair girl, she possessed in a modified form the features of her family, with the exception of the nose, Greek in the actor, aquiline in Richard.

Ethel's nose was delicately tip-tilted, and gave an expression of almost American vivacity to a face which, by reason of its high, broad brows, might have been unbecomingly intellectual. Her hair, parted in the middle, rippled over her forehead, and was tied in an apparently artless knot at the back of her neck. Yet she did not suggest a flapper.

She could not afford to dress in anything like the height of fashion, but she had the wonderful gift, less rare among American than Englishwomen, of wearing her clothes well.

Praise of Montague ran high, for Lady Meyville had been only too pleased to explain that Ethel's presentation was due entirely to the spontaneous liberality of her eldest son.

Mrs. Pegram was admiring his latest photograph. The only expensive ornaments of the room were elaborate frames containing Montague's pictures. These, in fact, were, with the exception of theatre tickets, the sole support contributed by him to the household.

"And who will present dear Ethel?" asked Mrs. Bolitho, "that is such an important matter."

Lady Meyville explained that that office would be performed by Lady Griselda Braythorpe.

At the mention of this celebrated woman of fashion, little Mrs. Pegram's breath came short.

"You really know her!" she exclaimed; "you know her well enough to——"

"Oh, yes, she is a cousin of mine."

"Really, but she never comes here! I should dote upon meeting her."

As a matter of fact, Lady Griselda, a good-hearted and exceedingly considerate person, only went to Gloucester Terrace when she was sure of not encountering the "Mothers' Meeting," as she called her somewhat distant cousin's matronly friends.

She had heard descriptions of them from Lady Meyville, descriptions that were humorous without being caustic, and although she delighted in hearing of their manners and customs, she had no wish to meet the ladies in the flesh.

"I fancy," said Mrs. Bolitho, biting her nails (the only form of manicure she practised), "that I have met Lady Griselda socially—in society."

A look of sheer surprise at this audacity appeared in the eyes of Mrs. Paxton-Pryce—a look that demanded an explanation of so astounding a statement.

Mrs. Bolitho rose to the occasion:

"I think I must have met her with the Princess of Salmon von Gluckstein. She is very well bred, is she not?"

Mrs. Paxton-Pryce reassured her on that point, and added:

"She is an intimate friend of my daughter's. I saw in *The Morning Post* that she dined in Green Street the other night."

The admission was unfortunate, because she had no wish to confess that her knowledge of Gwendolen's movements was derived solely from the public Press.

Soon after Mr. Ainslie's marriage he had found that the society of his mother-in-law, indulged in to any extent, would be fatal to his peace of mind. Her perpetual prattle about servants and babies and butchers'

bills pained him. Further, the interest she took in his frail body caused him all the anxiety of a new disease. She had attempted to take him in hand, to interfere with his internal economy. During long conversations, she had endeavoured to get him to make a clean breast of everything from which he had suffered, and let her advise on the matter.

This he had resented. A neuromaniac on the subject of his diseases, he was—in her case—unusually selfish with regard to them. His eccentric internal mechanism was the passion of his life. Such diligent study had he devoted to his case that for years he had held the opinion that any medical man would, compared to himself, be an amateur on the matter.

He never consulted a specialist, or even a general practitioner, and he was adamant on completing his journey to the tomb without the assistance of Mrs. Paxton-Pryce. Therefore it was that she and her husband (whom she had skilfully reduced to the condition of a nonentity, especially in his own home), were almost strangers to Green Street.

Hastily this lady added:

"You know poor Wilfred is such a great sufferer. He does not take proper care of himself. I am perfectly sure that he shows symptoms of pseudo-spinal catarrh. You know, my dear, that is quite the latest."

"Are there fashions in diseases?" queried Lady Meyville with an amused smile.

"Oh, yes, my dear. Appendicitis is quite out of date. They say that the operation has not fulfilled expectations. I had a long talk with Mrs. Beaver in the boot department; no, it was the perfumery department—I am sure it was the perfumery. You know Mrs. Beaver, don't you? Such a charming woman.

She has just bought a new foulard. It is quite a dream, but I don't think it suits *her* in the least. Well, she was telling me——"

Here followed a detailed description of a chaotic ailment, given at great length and almost incredible inaccuracy. Double dyspepsia and pleuro-meningitis were freely mentioned.

One physical fantasy led to another, and the room was animated by a contest in medical reminiscences.

Ethel and her mother simply provided the necessary punctuation to excite the speakers, who were enjoying themselves immensely.

The body is the most universally interesting subject that exists, and the puritanical morality of these women compelled them to take an interest in its capacity for bearing pain. They had no delicacy, scarcely common decency, in discussing the subject.

Suddenly the conversation changed.

With elephantine badinage, Mrs. Paxton-Pryce turned to Ethel.

"Have you seen much of Mr. Brinstable lately?"

"I?" asked the girl, with her lips imperceptibly compressed, and giving no signs of the pleasing titter that Mrs. Paxton-Pryce so evidently expected.

"Oh, I thought you took an interest in him. Every girl in the neighbourhood takes an interest in Mr. Brinstable."

Mr. Brinstable was a very prominent figure in Bayswater society. By means of effrontery and perseverance he had acquired almost the sole control of the firm of Messrs. Venables, Hampton and Brinstable. The senior partners, old men, who had built up this eminently respectable solicitor's business had, little by little and with entire confidence, left its direction in

the hands of the pushing and enterprising junior partner.

Billy Brinstable was forty years of age. He possessed a handsome flat in Hyde Park Mansions. Indeed, "Bayswater Billy" was regarded as one of the most desirable *partis* in the neighbourhood.

There was scarcely a Bayswater matron who did not hope to secure him as a son-in-law. At all dances his presence was desired. And, hitherto, though several of the prettiest local maidens had been spoken of quasi-matrimonially in connection with him, yet he had never actually proposed marriage to any one of them.

Bayswater feared that Billy might seek an alliance in some more fashionable portion of the metropolis. So Bayswater strained every nerve to prevent an occurrence which would be little short of a suburban calamity.

It cannot be said that the girlhood of Bayswater actually fought for him. Yet few presentable maidens had neglected to sue for his hand.

He was not actually spoken of as "Bayswater Billy," any more than Whiteley's is spoken of as "The Club." But just as that emporium is the centre of the social life of the district, so did William Augustus Brinstable represent the spirit and aspirations of Bayswater. His rough textured complexion resembled red blotting-paper. But for his large waterfall moustache, he would have looked very like his coachman. And when the two were sitting side by side in his smart phaeton, the bebuttonholed master seemed less like a gentleman than the servant. One felt that the coachman should have worn the moustache; that Billy should have donned the cockade.

Lady Meyville smiled at the absurdity of an innuendo connecting her daughter with this vulgarian.

"I doubt," she said, "whether any sane human being could take an interest in Mr. Brinstable."

A glance that did not escape Mrs. Pegram passed from the daughter to the mother. It was a short, sharp glance of anxiety. But Lady Meyville did not see it.

Mrs. Paxton-Pryce persisted.

"The other night I heard that you danced *three* dances with him."

"Where was that?" asked Lady Meyville incredulously.

"At the Mosensteins," Ethel answered with deliberation.

Bayswater receives Jews discreetly, and accepts their hospitality indiscriminately.

"Ethel—? You are joking, surely?" said Lady Meyville.

"No, I am not joking;" and then suddenly, quite calmly, she added:

"I am engaged to Mr. Brinstable."

Then there was a hubbub.

Mrs. Pegram flew to embrace her. Here, indeed, was an item of society news to carry back to Smelhurst!

Questions were showered upon the girl, questions as to the proposal and how it was made, and how happy she felt, and when it was to be. They remained unanswered, while the girl stared at her mother, who was pale, and made no sign.

This thunderclap—the idea of a union between her daughter and this blatant man—seemed to have paralysed her.

The other ladies were delighted. Bayswater had triumphed.

Mrs. Pegram regarded Smelhurst as a sort of colony of Bayswater. Immediately her thoughts turned in the direction of a cheap and useless wedding present. Perhaps a beautifully bound copy of *How to be Happy though Horrid*.

Mrs. Bolitho hoped the marriage would take place soon, because, she said, the Princess of Salmon von Gluckstein was in favour of short engagements. She even went so far in her enthusiasm as to promise the Princess's presence at the wedding.

"At any rate, you can have her among 'the list of those invited.' That sort of thing looks so well in the papers," she said, with an unbecoming smile of worldly wisdom.

Full of news, the ladies went their ways to publish it.

When they had gone, Ethel threw herself into her mother's arms in a passion of deep sobs.

Half an hour later she left the room.

A broken voice came from the sofa:

"Montague will be very disappointed."

CHAPTER V

BAYSWATER BILLY

JUBILANTLY high-spirited, Richard went home to dinner.

On his face was the triumphant look of a man who is assured of immediate success. He seized the slight figure of his mother in his arms, and covered the pale cheeks with kisses. He looked down tenderly into her face as he held it in his hands.

"They are terrible people, mother, revolting people! But I am briefed for the defence, and I shall get them off."

Vaguely she asked, "Whom are you going to defend, dear?"

"Ah, you haven't read the case," he answered, "but everybody is talking about it. Of course, my dear, all horrible things in this world pass you by. You have got troubles enough, mother. I am glad that you are spared the monstrous. But this is the turning-point in my life."

She did not answer.

"Mind, mother, it is a certainty. I am not raising false hopes. As sure as I am kissing you again and again, within a month my name will be made, my fortune will be made, and you shall have everything you want. No more horrible economy. You shall not have a care in the world if I can help it."

In spite of her trouble, some infinitesimal portion of

the happiness that gleamed in his eyes was reflected in hers.

Rapidly he explained to her that Durham, the criminal solicitor, had come down to chambers that morning and offered him the defence; that after three hours' hard work and consultation he had decided on a course which should render conviction impossible. England would be startled. The moral guilt of the prisoners had been completely proved in the police court. The public would believe that their acquittal was due to the brilliance of the advocate rather than to the peculiar condition of the law.

She interspersed words of callous congratulation, to which, in his engrossment, he hardly listened.

He gathered from her that Ethel was not well—had a bad headache—and would not appear at dinner.

During the meal she talked laboriously; she talked of trivial things, and then, when the parlour-maid had left the room, she told him that Ethel was engaged to Mr. Brinstable.

"What! Not Brinstable—the solicitor!"

"Yes."

"The vulgar man with the red face and the misfit moustache!"

"Yes."

In utter astonishment he exclaimed:—

"Is Ethel out of her mind?"

"Ethel has chosen for herself," said his mother.

"Well, I forbid the engagement. That is all I have to say. *You* don't approve, surely?"

She seemed to be staring far away.

He waited for some explanation, for some panegyric on unsuspected merits in William Brinstable, but she said nothing.

It seemed to him incredible that his sister, a girl of intellect and intelligence, the perpetual companion of his mother, his own firm friend, should possess a side to her individuality of which he was entirely ignorant. He could not conceive that any portion of her brain was so disorganised as to dominate her judgment and inspire love for this impossible man.

The demeanour of his mother, and his knowledge of his sister, drove him irresistibly to the impression that the girl was marrying for money.

Even had Brinstable been a millionaire, he would have vetoed the marriage for what that veto was worth.

His knowledge of the world showed him that Ethel would be buying money at far too high a price.

On the facts before him he interpreted the situation in this way.

Ethel had been deceived by the coarse glamour of the man. She had stifled her natural horror of his personality in the hope of ameliorating the poor little household in Gloucester Terrace. She was willing to sacrifice herself. His heart bled for her.

There was no other solution of the matter. She could not love Brinstable. She could not even like him.

And yet he knew that this coarse man exercised some mysterious, inexplicable influence over women, an influence incomprehensible to a masculine mind. Often, he remembered, girls' eyes had shot glances of admiration at Billy. It might be that the solicitor possessed some good, some alluring points. But had the giddy, giggling Bayswater girls sufficient perspicacity to detect them? He doubted it.

As he looked at his mother's evident uneasiness, it seemed to him that she understood the situation in its entirety.

He ceased playing with the apple-peel on his plate, rose, and stood by her side.

"We must not let her do this," he said.

"Richard, you don't understand. I have been in the world a little longer than you."

This invalid claim to wisdom she had never hitherto pressed.

"I am an old woman, Richard, and I know Ethel better even perhaps than I know you, and——"

"You are not going to suggest that there is any possibility of these two being happy together?"

"I don't see why they shouldn't get on," she urged in a half-hearted, unconvincing tone.

"I will tell you why they will not get on," he answered firmly, "because she is a lady, and he is not a gentleman."

To his intense surprise her answer was:—

"He's a rich man."

She had always been proud of her family, not altogether undistinguished, though in no sense eminent. He failed to understand the statement of defence that she flung, almost arrogantly, in his face.

"Then you will let her marry for money?"

"My dear Richard," she replied, "you don't realise what poverty is. You haven't enough pride."

She, to his thinking, was laying down a contradiction in terms.

She continued earnestly:

"Look at this house. It all wants re-papering. I need an extra servant. Is a girl like that to go about in cleaned gloves, to wear half-guinea toques? Mr. Brinstable is her only chance. I've thought of all the young men we know—and there are very few of them." Then she shot an arrow at him. "You never bring any

young men to the house. You're always at the club. How can she, dressed as she is, living as we do, hope to marry anything better than a stockbroker's clerk?"

Through his lips came a slight whistle.

She flared up at it.

"Is any man likely to marry the sister of a man—living as you live? Everybody knows about you and Mrs. Ainslie."

His voice trembled as he tried to control his anger at this purely Bayswaterian sentiment.

"If my sister is compelled to marry a man like that because of me—I'm very sorry. That's all."

"You should have thought of that before."

"I've nothing more to say."

"Naturally not, Richard! Montague, the head of the family, will undoubtedly approve."

CHAPTER VI

THE MISFORTUNES OF A GREAT ACTOR

AT 11 o'clock next morning, Montague rose in his flat in Park Place, St. James's. His temper was bad. The papers had not been satisfactory. In the eight morning journals which he regularly cast his eye over in bed only once or twice had his eye caught sight of his own name.

With great annoyance he had read in the *Daily Mail* that Mr. "Willie" Samuel had been riding in the Park, and that Mr. Maurice Murior had given "a luncheon party at Claridge's, and that amongst those present were Lady Pamela l'Estocq and Lady Féo Clarke, one of the most beautiful of the season's *débutantes*."

Of his own movements nothing was said. Now the two other actors mentioned were neck and neck with him in the race for the knighthood that was the aristocratic goal of their artistic careers.

In addition to all this, considerable prominence was given to the statement that Mr. Richard Meyville, "brother of the well-known actor, Mr. Cliftonville," was to defend the Yoghi and Priscilla at the forthcoming sessions at the Old Bailey.

This was very annoying. The fact that Richard's clients had brought the actor a certain unexpected publicity did not console him.

Surely Royalty would not look with favour on an actor whose brother was mixed up in so revolting a case!

Samuel and Murior were forging ahead. At all hazards he would himself ride in the Park to-morrow. But what else could be done?

Richard must be prevented from standing in the way of the family. (The family, to Mr. Cliftonville, was personified in himself.)

Though, at best, he could only be called the figure-head, yet there were moments when he regarded himself as the entire ship—the ship of which the figure-head was, however, the major part.

He sent his valet out with a telegram summoning Richard to the theatre.

Having breakfasted, he left his chambers and walked slowly down St. James's Street.

In spite of his irritation, he was pleased with his appearance, especially with the sheen on his "wonderful silver hair," as the papers loved to call it. His hat was conspicuously shiny. It was, in fact, an eminent hat, a hat of peculiar construction, a hat such as could only be worn by an eminent man. But so subtly designed were its curves that even commonplace features would have looked eminent beneath it. The only thing that could be said against his fur-trimmed coat was that it looked too warm for the weather.

There was something hierarchic about him. Indeed, Montague, as he strutted along, presented the appearance of a sporting Cardinal.

Eagerly, as was his wont, he scanned the passers-by to detect the look of surprised awe that is the due of a celebrity.

One man, on catching sight of him, identified him to the lady on his arm.

"There is Mr. Cliftonville, the actor," he said, and the lady seemed pleased.

Another passer-by, realising that he was in the presence of a figure built on beautiful lines, explained the matter thus:—

“By Jove, that is Beerbohm Tree, the actor.”

A shade of unwarranted annoyance passed over Montague's face.

When he reached the theatre he was surprised and pained to find that Richard had not arrived, but instead of his brother he found a laconic telegram, “Busy; come here to my chambers at four—Richard.” It ruffled the actor considerably.

So he was to be at the beck and call of this defender of the Yoghi, was he?

Two days before, this young brother of his had browbeaten him in his own theatre. He had even extorted the promise of a cheque. There was some consolation in the fact that he, Montague, had hitherto forgotten to remember about the cheque. But he now firmly made up his mind that he would never send it. While looking at his reflection in the shop windows he caught sight of Lord Lashbridge. This man (like himself) had all the external attributes of the truly great. The third marquess, a gentleman of considerable culture, a shrewd critic of the arts and of men, had, owing to his eccentric politics, never reached any more remarkable eminence than a—Mastership of the Ante-Chamber. He had introduced into this country the works of many French painters. He had drawn attention to the works of certain English writers hitherto unknown. He was also an expert in the lost art of military strategy. Had he not been a peer he would surely have been a great man. But at the age of fifty he was content to be merely happy.

Having failed to be great in a conspicuous manner,

he took a deep interest in the minor things of life. The education of his beautiful daughter, Lady Pamela l'Estocq, had absorbed much of his time. He devoted considerable attention to his clothes, which were always very much too large for him. Also, he was a Grand Officer of the Legion of Honour, and the chairman of the Great Southern Railway.

His works on military manœuvres, unknown in this country, were text-books in Germany, France, and Japan. It was his proudest boast that he was a complete insular failure.

On this occasion he wore a white hat with a black band, a huge flapping grey coat, and in his immense white satin stock was a large pink pearl surrounded by small black opals.

"I congratulate you," he said, as he put a rough, yellow glove on Montague's shoulder.

"You have seen the piece? It's a good piece," answered the actor modestly, in anticipation of a personal compliment.

"No, I haven't," said Lashbridge in a musical voice, one of his greatest charms. He was delighted to meet Montague, whose vanity always amused him. "I prefer to see actors off the stage. They interest me more. The illusion is destroyed when I see an actor actually acting. You know I have taken a great interest in the Labour question. To see the labourer at work gives me no idea of the true condition of his life. I must see him at home or in Parliament to form a judgment."

"But the actor is not a workman," protested Mr. Cliftonville.

"I should say that everyone who works is a workman. And it seems to me the proudest title that a

man can own. No. I am congratulating you on your brother. I see that this extraordinarily clever young barrister, Richard Meyville, is your brother. I happened to be in the Law Courts the other day, and I heard him. Excellent. The man talks sound sense. And, what is more, he talks it in good English. I congratulate you most heartily."

Then he passed on.

Richard was becoming somewhat of a nuisance to Montague.

On reaching his theatre the actor—after a few moments' deep thought in the office—called for his Press agent, to whom he handed a piece of paper on which he had written these words:

"Mr. Montague Cliftonville, looking handsomer than ever, was talking to Lord Lashbridge in St. James's Street yesterday morning."

"Have that typewritten, and take it yourself to *The Planet*. It must come out in the '*Crème de la Crème*' column. Mind there is no mistake about it. The other day they altered a paragraph of mine and made it absurd. Instead of saying that *I* was riding with the Duke of Liverpool, they said that the Duke was riding with *me*. That sort of thing does me a lot of harm in Society."

"Yes, governor."

"I suppose that in the theatre you do not allude to me as 'the governor,' do you?"

"Oh, no. We call you 'the chief.'"

"Quite right. Irving used always to be called 'the chief.'"

He was pleased to find that a rehearsal of one of his provincial companies was taking place on the stage.

He went down and spent half an hour acting all the parts and explaining how totally incapable were the actors whom he had engaged.

They were mostly provincial mummers who could only act and could not dress. They spoke their lines audibly. They could impersonate their characters intelligently. But they would not shine in Semi-Society. Therefore, Mr. Cliftonville had no need for them in London, where he only engaged professional beauties, male and female.

He explained to them kindly that the sole duty of an actor was to look like a gentleman. (He was so much of a gentleman that he was almost genteel, surely a terrible thing to be.) He further described his early struggles on the stage.

"My first appearance," he said, "was as the Ghost in *Hamlet*. I began absolutely at the bottom of the ladder. I played the Ghost at the Lyceum, and what do you think the papers said? They said, 'Mr. Cliftonville's Ghost is essentially a gentlemanlike ghost.' Mind you, I was a mere beginner. That was ten years ago. I realised that the ghost of Hamlet's father was a gentleman first and a ghost afterwards. That is a thing that no other actor had noticed."

The company listened with respectful incredulity. They could not conceive that a man who had risen to the heights of their profession should be so perfectly inane. It was a well-known fact that his Ghost had been a sort of mincing dandy suffering from anæmia.

"Rex," the eminent critic and caricaturist, had, indeed, used the word "gentlemanlike" in gentlemanlike derision.

Having lunched at the Carlton grill-room, he returned to the theatre and busied himself ostenta-

tiously with his various advisers in devising schemes for not attending to business.

He refused to see a large number of persons on the plea of pressure of work. He toyed with the illustrated papers, searching for paragraphs and pictures of himself.

In *The Phœnix* he found a poem which annoyed him intensely.

THE PERSEVERING PLAYWRIGHT

*He was a dramatist whose name
Will always be unknown to Fame—
One of the very, very few
Who are not mentioned in "Who's Who."*

*He had, with quite consummate tact
Elaborated, act by act,
A play of great dramatic worth,
With problems, sin and wholesome mirth,*

*Upon a squalid murder he
Had built a fane of chivalry,
'Mid clash of steel and roar of guns
Relieved with admirable puns.*

*Each thinking man will surely say,
"By Jove, I'd like to see that play!
It seems too splendid to be true,
But if it is, egad, I'll boo!"*

*This author had a nervous dread
His masterpiece would not be read
By courteous managers, who might
With kindly condescension write:*

*"It pains me very much to say
That your extremely brilliant play
Is really far too good for me,
Yours very truly, H. B.-T."*

*Or yet again, "This play is bad,
But send your next, and I'll be glad,
Young man, to read it by-and-by—
Yours most sincerely, H. B. I."*

*"Dear Sir,—The play you write about
Arrived when I was lunching out.
Most of my secretaries say
It will not suit.—(Per pro) GEORGE A."*

*"My dear old fellow, it appears
That though I kept your play for years,
I've lost it now. So you are free,
To send it elsewhere.—ARTHUR B."*

*"The public at the present day
Won't stand THREE strong parts in one play.
If you'll amalgamate the three
In one, I'll play it, MONTIE C."*

*"What did he do?" you aptly ask,
"How did this man attempt the task
Of getting managers to see
The merits of his comedy?"*

*He merely fixed upon a day
To hold an auction of his play,
And asked ALL managers to be
Prepared to hear it—sharp at three.*

*And he who made the highest bid
Should have the play. That's what he did.*

*(And that is quite the fairest way
For managers to buy a play.)*

*He ordered cake and wine and tea,
Kop's ale, and other drinks (for he
Knew that the managerial brain
Is sometimes fired by dry champagne.)*

*He waited until half-past four,
But only one man crossed his door,
He heard the play, and HE ALONE
(His name was utterly unknown).*

*"I've heard your admirable prose,"
The unknown said, "and I propose . . ."
The author smiled, "We shall not fail,
I trust, to bring about a sale."*

*"For moderate charges I'll purvey
All notices about your play.
I have as clients J. M. B.,
And Captain M. and Sydney G.—*

*You soon will rank with ARTHUR WING!!!
So I will send you everything
That in the papers there may be—
I'm a Press-Cutting Agency."*

Evidently the "Montie C." was himself.

The Phœnix apparently intended to hold him up to public ridicule. Surely this was libellous.

True, other managers were alluded to. He would take up the cudgels on their behalf.

He therefore summoned his advertising adviser, and, after a lengthy interview, instructed his legal adviser to write a letter to *The Phœnix* demanding an apology,

and a letter to *The Era*, explaining the whole matter and containing a copy of the letter to *The Phoenix*.

Having taken these steps in the interest of Art, he jumped into a taxicab and drove down to the Temple. After ascending three flights of crazy stairs he found himself in front of a door so covered with names that it looked more like a piece of literature than any sort of entrance. It was opened by Jubb, a shambling old man, grey and faded, shrill of voice, untidy, and unintelligent.

Richard paid for a third share in his useless services: and the clerk's utter incapacity had stood somewhat in the way of his employers' success.

In a small room, scantily furnished, chiefly with books and dust, the actor found his brother surrounded by a mass of documents.

"Oh, for heaven's sake take off that fur coat," said Richard, who, following the precedent of a great Lord Chief Justice, detested this form of garment in his chambers.

With a surprised stare Montague looked at him. Richard's impertinence seemed superhuman. Yet he had spoken as a man accustomed to be obeyed. For the first time in his life the actor detected that he was inferior in manhood to the barrister.

He took off his coat. Without it he felt incapable of playing the part, the words of which he had improvised in the cab.

Instead of immediately forbidding his brother to proceed with the defence of the Yoghi, he began by asking if they were all well at home.

As Richard looked at him, the conviction rose to his mind that Montague had no part or lot in the family, either in its joys or in its sorrows, that he

himself must bear on his shoulders the weight of all responsibility in connection with his mother and sister.

"Yes," he said abruptly, "we are all well at home. I do not think it will be necessary for you to send that cheque."

"What cheque was that?" asked Montague, anxious, as usual, to explain away neglect by suggested absence of mind.

"We need not go into that, Montague. You promised to send mother a cheque for £30. You will be pleased to hear that it is not needed. I will pay for Ethel's dress."

Then, having finished with the subject, Richard asked the reason of the interview.

"I hear that you are going to defend this Yoghi?"

"Yes, do you want to see the trial?" he inquired, knowing that his brother often attended the Old Bailey during sensational cases, "if so, I can work it for you."

Assuming an air of great gravity, the other said:

"I think you are doing a very unwise thing. In the first place, it is not the sort of case that it will do you any good to be mixed up in. And, in the second place, you are sure to be beaten. Of course, you will get your name in the papers. But every sort of advertisement is not *good* advertisement."

"My dear Montague, you must really allow me to be the best judge of that—not of advertisement in general—of course," he answered with a smile, "but of my own business. I know I shall get an acquittal. Besides, I have accepted the brief. I am going through with it."

"Is that your final answer?"

"Absolutely."

Montague tried another argument. He said:

"Your name will be all over the place, and Ethel will be asked questions about it. You ought not to bring this sort of thing into her life. You oughtn't, really."

Richard was amused at his brother's palpable insincerity, but he did not guess his real reason for moving in the matter.

"By the way," he said, "I wish you would see that your advertising manager—or whoever it is—does not have me described, in chatty paragraphs, as your brother."

There was no intentional insult in the younger man's mind.

Montague blushed crimson.

"I don't understand what you mean."

"Any theatrical association connected with a bar-rister is bad for him. You know an English jury dislikes the slightest suggestion of the histrionic. It savours to them of clap-trap."

There was nothing more for Montague to say. He felt sure that the knighthood argument would not appeal to his brother.

Besides, with that craftiness which shallow intellects mistake for diplomacy, he preferred to give the untrue reason for anything he wished to obtain.

As he was on the point of leaving, Richard suddenly stopped him.

"By the bye, you haven't had time to write to mother—or to Ethel with regard to her engagement? What do you think of it?"

Montague, with his hand on the door-knob, turned blank eyes upon him.

Impatiently Richard inquired:

"I suppose Ethel's letter to you didn't miscarry? I understood she wrote to you."

The actor became reproachfully dignified.

"I do think," he said, "that—any sister of mine should consult me—before becoming engaged."

Richard laughed:

"My dear Montague, you're so very busy!"

"I don't approve of—any sister of mine becoming engaged—without consulting me."

He spoke as one who did not approve of anybody becoming engaged except himself.

Richard turned over a page of his brief as he asked:

"I suppose you've taken the trouble to read the letter?"

"Of course, yes.

Then, somewhat indignantly, he added:

"I don't think you treat me with proper respect. I should naturally read any letter—from my sister in which she stated that she was engaged. But I ought to have been told before. I shouldn't have been kept in the dark."

Richard looked up from his papers, and succinctly explained to Montague the suddenness of the whole thing.

"You are the head of the family," he said. "What do you think of it?"

"I think," he replied, toying with the golden knob of his malacca stick, "that a sister of mine should have done better—much better. I could have introduced her to—people."

"Then why the dickens didn't you?" came from Richard.

Cryptically the other replied:

"I have my—Art to attend to. Ethel ought to have done—better."

So, in a really bad temper, he left Essex Court and went back to his chambers, where he decided to engage a new leading lady for his next production.

CHAPTER VII

AN EMINENT MEDICAL MAN

AT six o'clock Richard had finished his day's work.

On the moment that he put aside his papers he was faced by the idea of Ethel and her unfortunate engagement. He left his chambers, and, nervously antagonistic, walked westwards along the Strand. It was almost a relief when he found himself in Brook Street, at the door of Dr. Plagden.

The eminent ladies' specialist received him at once—cordially, almost deferentially.

Dr. Plagden's fine, benevolent head was set on the massive shoulders of a short but athletic frame. The white curly hair grew in thick clusters about his broad forehead, making him almost suggest a human cauliflower.

His face was calculated to inspire confidence in him, both as a man and as a doctor. Yet neither his appearance nor his exquisite manners had been mainly instrumental in procuring him his income of £8,000 a year.

Bursts of childish laughter had risen from the consulting-room as Richard approached it. And, on his entrance, the doctor dismissed his five chubby children, with whom he had been playing with boyish enthusiasm.

Richard was struck by the contrast between the man's profession and his surroundings.

"I have come to ask you a favour," said he.

Instantly Plagden offered him a seat, and stated that he was entirely at his service.

Whereupon the barrister placed before him several complicated points of medical jurisprudence involved in the case of the Yoghi and Priscilla.

Lucidly the specialist explained the matters. Furthermore, he stated that Richard's clients were by no means unusual examples of depravity.

"My dear sir," said the smiling old man, "in my profession we are no more astounded at these things than you are surprised when a man of good position becomes, for no apparent reason—let us say—a forger. These things happen. They cannot be accounted for."

Richard was on the point of leaving, profuse in his thanks.

"No," said the other, "do not thank me. It is entirely due to you that I occupy the position I now hold."

"I don't quite follow."

Plagden became reminiscent.

"Six years ago, in spite of a life of hard work, I had only scraped together an infinitesimal practice in Maida Vale. It was then that I met you, at the Westminster Police Court. Do you remember? You were prosecuting a member of my profession in the absence of your leader. I was a witness for the prosecution. Do you remember saying to me, 'What fools these people are! If they would only work in a secret partnership, the law could never touch them! There would never be any difficulty about the certificate of death!' I thought over those words of yours. I went into partnership, a secret partnership, with a brilliant young fellow who had just left Guy's. All my capital I invested in this house and in acquiring the surround-

ings of success. To the shadow, in time, came the substance. "To-day I am doing pretty well," he added, with a benevolent smile. "I owe my success entirely to you. So anything I can do for you in any way is a great pleasure to me."

It was with a feeling of uneasiness that Richard heard the man's story, for Plagden was one of the most striking, distinctive figures in social life. His name was notorious. His occupation was openly discussed. Many fashionable women were spoken of as having suffered from "Plagdenitis."

His consulting-room was bare of the usual photographs of beautiful women. There were no mementoes of gratitude to show that he ever attended lady patients at all.

Even as Richard felt his hand in the strong palm of the doctor he realised he was in the presence of a man who had beyond question earned himself several hundred years of penal servitude. But his thoughts did not escape the quick perception of the other.

"I suppose you regard me as a villain," said he, laughing. "I am not a hypocrite. But there are many moments in my life when I look upon myself as a philanthropist. Not only have I helped scores of women, but I have saved many lives. But for me they would have gone to nervous, impecunious, morphia-saturated practitioners, shivering, while operating, at the spectre of the Law. Agony and death would have resulted. But, thanks to your advice, I, in perfect health, beyond money cares, without fear of the grip of the Law, have brought my practice to a point of methodical accuracy that eliminates all element of danger."

The laughter of the children heard on the stairs

seemed in strange contrast to the statements that fell from the father's lips. Plagden appeared to take no little pride in his profession.

"You are a young man. You see, in the main, the bright side of life. You see around you at dances, at dinners, at theatres nothing but happy women. You mingle with women who tell you solely of their triumphs and their happiness. But every woman who comes into this room leaves her mask at the door, and reveals to me a face hideous with terror. From the depths of despair I seize them, and I send them back into the world. But only once, Meyville—only once. And I make this quite clear at their first visit. On a solitary occasion only has a woman returned to me. In spite of her threats of exposure, in spite of her tears, I sent her away. She is the only one of my patients who has died. I do not say," he continued, "that I am making Society more moral. I am not Hercules to cleanse that stable, and I suppose no man living but myself has any idea what that stable is. I only see the bad side. But it's a huge expanse of horror. I could tell you stories of noble names that would make you go out and commit suicide—if you have any lingering faith in humanity.

"And the strange thing is this," he continued, "the revenge that Society takes upon me. Socially I do not exist. I go into no home except as a professional friend. My wife lives apart from other women. No doctor, except my partner, will meet me in consultation, nor, indeed, anywhere else! They refuse to take my eldest boy at Eton. But I am happy. Yes—strange though it may seem to you—I am happy in the love of my wife, who understands, and of my children, who—I trust—will never know. Yes,

although I hold the inner secrets even of palaces, I have scarcely a friend in the world; I have my debtors. But I ought to be ashamed, I suppose, to say that I am a wonderfully happy man. Good-bye, Meyville; I am glad to hear that you are getting on so well in your profession."

Bewildered, Richard went out into the street. The law of expediency was the law of life.

* * * * *

He longed suddenly for the society of Mrs. Ainslie. With a brisk step he turned towards Green Street.

It was half-past seven. Mrs. Ainslie would, no doubt, be dressing for dinner. Still, he would see.

He was surprised to find how anxious he felt lest she should not be at home.

Happily, she was at home, lying on the sofa in the drawing-room—white, green, and gold. She looked tired.

A creamy pink silk tea-gown clung to her figure. On his entrance a sparkle came into her eyes. All symptoms of fatigue vanished in a glow of delighted surprise. She took pleasure in showing, without any trivial coquetry, the joy she felt at his arrival.

Heartily she said:

"This *is* fortunate! I had a horrid, hot, dull day at Raningham. Some wretched woman stole a chiffon boa of mine from the chairs near the polo-ground. Really, it is astonishing that one should have to pay a subscription in order to move in the society of thieves. I have had nothing but bad luck to-day—until now. We are not going out to dinner. You must stay and dine. Wilfred is horribly ill. He has got some new

symptoms, I think about fourteen, and he would like to tell you about them. Then he will go out to the club. He is always well enough to go out to the club."

She pressed his hand significantly.

"Have you any news?" she asked as she drew him to the sofa.

"No," he said shortly.

"Yes, you have," she corrected. "I know you've got news. I hoped it would be good news. But there's something, Richard, in your face that tells me you're worried about something. It can't be your sister's engagement!"

"How the dickens did you know?" he asked.

He always tried, as far as was possible, to keep his luxurious life brightened by the sun of Mrs. Ainslie separate from the more or less squalid details of the home in Gloucester Terrace. He was a butterfly trying to shake off his chrysalis form.

"How did I know? My dear boy, my mother always writes me all the gossip of Bayswater."

He shot a questioning glance at her.

"Why does Mrs. Paxton-Pryce take any interest in me? She doesn't even know that I know you. But she knows as much as is good for her to know."

Gwen laughed.

"Oh, I think she does, in an indefinite way. But she doesn't know that we are—well, I don't know what she knows. But any item of news, such as the engagement of a person I've never met, or the dismissal of a servant I haven't seen, she always writes to me about. I admit I don't always read the letters. But this time I caught sight of your name, and I read about the happy event."

"It isn't such a happy event as all that."

Clearly, he was not anxious to talk about the subject. He said, "I don't think they are suited to one another."

"What married people are?" she inquired. "But I suppose it will be all right."

Neither was she anxious to talk about the subject. Gwen wanted him entirely and always to herself. Why should he be interested in a mother, or a sister, or a brother! She ought to be, surely, his whole interest in life. She dismissed the subject with a flippant "Well, I hope she'll be happier in her second marriage." Then she paused, looking at him through half-closed eyes.

"But haven't you any *good* news? I have a sort of feeling that good luck is coming your way."

"You have wonderful intuition," he answered, smiling. "You seem to know everything about me."

"When one is in love one has intuition—at least, women have. What is your good news?"

"I'm going to defend the Yoghi," he replied.

She clapped her hands.

"So you did take my advice! You did go and see some solicitor!"

"No," he answered, "Durham brought me the brief."

Then, suddenly, he said:—

"I must be going. I've got to dine at home."

"Oh, no, no," she pleaded, "you must not desert me. For five minutes I have known that you would be here all the evening. You mustn't go away now."

The influence of her eyes brought him back to the sofa.

Searching in his waistcoat pocket, she found a gold cigarette case, a gift of her own. From it she took an American cigarette for herself, and placed another

between his lips. Having lighted it, she drew a long breath and blew out a puff of smoke with a charmingly fascinating movement of her mouth.

"Oh, Richard, your cigarettes are worse than ever. But they remind me of you. When you are not here I very often go into a cheap tobacconist's and say, 'Give me the worst cigarettes in the world.' They always answer, 'Madam, we do not keep bad cigarettes.' 'But some cigarettes are worse than others,' I suggest, 'aren't they?' On that point we are at one. 'Then give me the worst you have.' And they give me a few cigarettes in a horrid cardboard box, and a great many presents of different sorts, photographs of actresses that one has never heard of, and tiny little cardboard tunnels. Then I come back and revel in an orgy of horrible tobacco, and then my Richard comes into the room and takes me in his arms like this."

A smile of amusement came into his face while she drew his arms towards her and placed them round her shoulders.

"Are you going away—now?" she asked.

"Yes, I must," he answered irresolutely.

"No, you aren't," she persisted, "you are not, you are not, you are not! And I will tell you why. You owe me a great debt of gratitude."

"A debt of gratitude makes most of us bankrupt," was his comment.

"But not you, Richard," she said, shaking her head.

"Don't you ask why? Have you no curiosity?"

"I don't think I have," he answered.

It is in her own drawing-room that a woman is most certain of success. It is the battlefield that she has herself prepared for her victories. He knew that she would have her way.

"I'm afraid that in making you grateful I shall make you a little disappointed. But I am going to risk it—I arranged with Durham that you should defend the Yoghi and Priscilla. I guaranteed the money for their defence."

"You!" he cried. Then, in admiration, he added, "You are a wonderful woman!"

"I'm wonderfully in love," she explained. A curling wave of smoke came from her lips. "Stay with me."

In the great as well as in the little things of life she generally had her way.

CHAPTER VIII

THE BEHAVIOUR OF BILLY

DURING the next few days Richard devoted himself to work with extraordinary diligence. He toiled at the details of his cases, and especially at the preparation of the forthcoming defence at the Old Bailey.

He had schooled himself into the belief that Ethel's engagement was a matter of Fate. He had found that his veto possessed no force either with Ethel or his mother. He tried to dismiss the matter from his mind.

He spent many hours in the Middle Temple Library and in the Courts. He remained until late at his chambers, returning to them after an early dinner in the Hall. He succeeded in instilling into himself a desire to work for work's sake. He pursued work with the zeal of a religion and the enthusiasm of a vice. During these days he saw little of Gwendolen.

He had, of course, congratulated Ethel—with such warmth as he could assume. But that amount had chilled her. She had scarcely been able to keep back her tears.

One morning, as he was finishing his breakfast with her, she said suddenly:

“We can't go on like this, Richard.”

Her eyes looked pleadingly towards him.

“How do you mean, old girl?”

This was the first occasion since the engagement that he had spoken kindly to her.

“You must try to like Billy—for my sake.”

He shrugged his shoulders, after the manner of a man prepared to do his best, against his better judgment.

"Besides," she began.

"Besides what?"

She had prepared a tentative word or two in praise of Billy. But now she felt that he would laugh at her.

"Besides, he likes you very much, and—" she felt that she was striking a false note, "and—he said he would give you all his firm's work."

"The devil he did!" cried Richard. This put the crowning touch to his disgust.

He strode about the room. Then he came back to his sister, held her firmly by the arms, and looked into her eyes, and when he had somewhat recovered from his anger he said:

"You've done this for me, partly for me, at least."

"Oh, no, no!" she protested.

The affront was so outrageous that he felt he could never look the man in the face. Brinstable had preyed not only on his sister's poverty, but on his. It was unbearable. Ethel sought for some explanation, that, even though it should discredit her more hopelessly, might place Brinstable in a better light. The search was vain.

"Richard, I must tell you all."

"Can there be anything more to tell me?" he gasped.

"Yes," she answered with surprising calmness, speaking very slowly. "There is the truth. He was very, very kind. He knew how poor we are and—oh, how can I tell you?"

"Go on."

"Well, you remember when I was staying with the

Mosensteins at Weybridge. We all played Bridge a good deal, and I lost a lot of money. I didn't mean to. But they played high; and at first I won, and then I lost and lost. It seemed as though everyone was making money, and I believed that I should also. At last I found that I owed fifty pounds. I couldn't sleep that night. I didn't know which way to turn. And he was very kind."

"Why didn't you come to me—to mother?" Richard asked hoarsely.

"Oh, Richard, I knew you hadn't it to give. And mother never has any money. You see it was so much!"

"I'd have found it—if you'd only told me—if you'd only told me!"

"I did write to Montie, but he said he couldn't manage it."

"The brute!" hissed Richard.

"But he wrote me an awfully nice letter and said how sorry he was."

"He did, did he? Typewritten, was it?"

"No, of course not," answered Ethel, instantly on the defence of her favourite brother.

"Well, so Willy——"

"Who's Willy?"

"Mr. Brinstable."

"Oh!" groaned Richard.

"Willy guessed what was the matter, and he was very considerate, and said it was of no importance. Mind you, he behaved quite like a *gentleman*." She purposely emphasised the word in reply to his quick glance. "Really, he is an awfully kind man, though he is a little——"

"I admit it— But, thank God, he *behaved* like a gentleman."

"Don't make it too hard for me, Richard, please."

"No, bless you, darling."

Ethel breathed a deep sigh of relief.

"He was awfully nice about you. He said how clever——"

"Damn it, don't talk about me."

"Of course, you think very badly of him," she said sadly, "but, believe me, Richard," and she spoke with a pathetic look of enthusiasm, "he has many good points."

"Let us hope so," he answered; "I shall be on the look out for them."

It was as the result of this interview that William Brinstable came to dinner at Gloucester Terrace a few nights later, to meet Richard.

The ordeal in the little dining-room was awkward for everyone except Billy. Lady Meyville, however, directed the conversation on ordinary topics, talking chiefly about the dramatic enterprises of Montague.

Brinstable professed a sincere admiration for the Art of his future brother-in-law. He said that many of his clients were anxious to invest money in the Pall Mall Theatre. Although he had not as yet the pleasure of Montague's acquaintance, he expressed a great desire to know him.

"Your son, Lady Meyville," said he, "is the ideal gentleman on the stage. When you see him in any play he seems to you rather a pal than a player."

Then he heaved with fat laughter. "That is pretty good, eh—'rather a pal than a player.' I do not have much time for moving in theatrical circles, but before the New Lyric Club was closed I knew pretty well everybody."

And then followed a florid account of hilarious nights spent with celebrated actors—celebrated chiefly at the New Lyric.

“But, of course, all that is over now,” he added. “I am going to settle down. I am going to bury the past,” and he roared with hilarity.

He was one of those men who regard the obvious as amusing.

Towards Richard he adopted a patronising air, encouraging, and, indeed, eulogistic.

Billy was tolerant about the cooking, he was officiously non-committal about the wine, and, altogether, succeeded in reaching, in Richard’s estimation, a unique pinnacle of snobbishness.

In time the dinner wore to its end; and then, when the women had left the room, Billy immediately offered to put Richard in the way of getting some *good* port. He even offered to send him in a dozen cases, as he said, “It is a good thing to be able to offer your guests a really *sound* glass of port.”

To this proposal there was but one suitable answer, to kick the man out of the house. But, such a course being impracticable, Richard only nodded assent.

“Now, let us get to business,” said Mr. Brinstable. “Ethel and I do not believe in long engagements. We are going to be married some time next month. And I think the marriage ought to be rather a swell affair, don’t you? You know we cannot very well be married from here. The house is very nice, and all that, but it won’t hold the people. Now, I propose taking a big room at the Bayswater Palace Hotel, and being married at St. Michael and All Sepulchres. Of course, I will pay the exes.”

The enthusiasm that he had expected was not forth-

coming. Richard simply said that the idea was reasonable.

"Reasonable, my boy!" replied Brinstable. "I call it handsome, deuced handsome, and don't you forget it. I daresay it seems to you an odd thing. But Billy is blunt."

(It was his practice to allude to himself on very special occasions in the third person.)

If there was one thing he plumed himself upon in a degree second only to his vulgarity it was his excessive bluntness. He regarded his bluntness as an excuse even for his coarseness. He posed as a person in whom there was no guile. He was compelled, by some uncontrollable natural force, to tell the truth on all occasions, no matter how unpleasant to other persons or even to himself the telling of such truth might be.

"The first time I saw your sister, I said to myself, 'Billy, that is the girl for you. She is refined. She is delicate. She has got that deuced charm of manner, that well-bred pose, that you want in a wife, Billy, my boy. You are not in society yourself, because of your bluntness. But, with a refined, smart girl like that, you will end up on the top of Belgravia, and don't make any mistake.' That is what I said to myself, and further I added, 'If the girl has got any money, so much the better for you, Billy, my boy. But, with or without money, she must be Mrs. Bill,' and there it is. Now your sister's looks and manners and refinement are worth more to me than any amount of pounds, shillings and pence, and if that is not love, ask me another!"

The idea of anybody going to this individual for an opinion on any one of the vital things of life struck Richard as tragically comic.

The absurdity of the idea swept away some of the tragedy.

"You see, ours is a real good business. But we want to enlarge it, want to spread it, want to get as many of the fat things as we can. There are lots of 'em going about now, I tell you. But you don't get 'em by sitting at the office. You don't get 'em by sitting down and doing nothing."

A shudder ran down Richard's frame. He suspected that the other man was about to propound the modern system of bringing a business to disaster.

And, indeed, Brinstable explained that business was carried on chiefly by the pursuit of pleasure, that launches on the river, supper-parties at the Savoy, motors at Ascot, were the sure means of increasing a sound and remunerative business connection.

The game had been played so often and so disastrously that it appeared incredible that another player should take a hand in it.

And yet with his confident gestures, Brinstable expounded the methods by which he proposed to extend his business. With every detail that he described Richard felt invited to look forward to inevitable ruin.

He did not care to cross-examine him, because he had no hope of eliciting any information of a reassuring nature.

He shivered at the prospect. He felt the futility of even trying to "hope for the best."

Billy's attitude at the dinner-table had convinced Richard that his future brother-in-law looked upon him as a negligible factor in the family affairs, that he regarded him, in fact, as quite an amateur and casual person. It was intolerable to play this part in the

eyes of a man whom he thoroughly despised, even if he did not actually hate him.

But the other seemed completely unsuspecting.

From his pocket-book he produced a newspaper cutting.

"By the bye," he said, "have you seen this in the *Pall Mall* to-night?" and he handed it across the table.

Richard read:

"We have much pleasure in announcing the engagement of Miss Meyville, the pretty sister of Mr. Cliftonville, the eminent actor, to Mr. William Brinstable, the popular solicitor."

He handed the paper back.

"Montague never misses a chance," he said to himself.

"Now," Billy pointed out, "I am particularly anxious to get in with Mr. Cliftonville, or Montie, as I suppose I ought to call him. We can do one another a bit of good—give and take, you know. We must fix up a little bit of supper one of these nights."

And other similar statements and suggestions he made with characteristic bluntness.

At last, Richard, finding William beyond him, took his future brother-in-law in to the drawing-room.

Throwing himself on the sofa by the side of his *fiancée*, Mr. Brinstable told stories relative to his social and financial shrewdness. As he proved his deliberate conviction that there was no one like Billy for general merit, the eyes of his three listeners were riveted on the carpet.

At length, the bridegroom-elect felt that his performance was complete, that he had impressed his audience with the importance of his personality. Moreover, he grew hungry; he had not dined so sumptuously as was his wont.

On the plea of a supper at the Carlton with business friends, a syndicate bringing out a new iron ore mine, he took his leave.

Richard and his mother listened to the sound of whispered words and hilarious laughter in the passage, as Mr. Brinstable said good-bye to his betrothed.

Then that gentleman got into a hansom, and drove to his club, bawling its name to the cabman.

His club was the Junior Constitutional.

CHAPTER IX

THE BEST CLERK IN THE TEMPLE

ETHEL, realising that Billy's appearance had been a *fiasco*—that neither her mother nor Richard was prepared with anything in the nature of a complimentary or even of a consolatory comment upon him—decided to retire to bed.

Nervously, Lady Meyville spoke:

"It was very kind of you, Richard, to leave that thirty pounds for Ethel's dress. I know you can't afford it."

"No, I'm not exactly affluent. I've got precisely £2 10s. in the bank."

"My poor Richard! Oh, if I'd known things were so bad as that, I wouldn't have let you do it." Lady Meyville continued: "Montague was here to-day, and he was delighted that Ethel was to be presented. He seemed very pleased at the marriage. So that's a good thing, isn't it? He doesn't exactly *know* Mr. Brinstable. But he said he'd heard he was a good sort. Those were Montague's very words. And you know how hard he is to please! It seems that Mr. Brinstable—somehow I don't seem to be able to call him William yet——" She did not finish her sentence. "But I suppose I shall get accustomed to him. I'm an old woman, and perhaps I'm rather foolish. Anyhow, it's a comfort to know that Mr. Brinstable is very popular. He goes everywhere in Bayswater. What we regard as his commonness, other people consider cheery affability."

"Perhaps Bayswater has overlooked his bluntness," said Richard grimly.

"Of course, he's not handsome."

"He is revolting."

"I wouldn't say that," interposed his mother.

But Richard's indignation carried him on.

"The thing is impossible. The man is impossible. There never has been such a person. He is overdrawn, grotesque. He is a caricature of—something I've never had the bad luck to meet. Even as I looked at him I said, 'This is a phantom. "Bayswater Billy" is a thing that cannot exist either on earth or sea. My good man, civilisation has never evolved a thing like you. You are a lampoon on the English race. You appear to be sitting there, but you are not. You are as unreal as the Gorgon or Cacus, or any of the monstrosities that Ulysses baffled.' "

Sadly Lady Meyville summed up the matter as she kissed him good-night:

"We must make the best of it. Montague, I'm afraid, is a—little disappointed. But he was kind enough not to show it."

Next morning Richard appeared on behalf of the plaintiff before Mr. Justice Tufnell in a "running down" action. He was "devilling" for a very busy common-law barrister, and, except for the opening speech, he had to do the entire case himself. With restless, but effective, energy he threw himself into the cross-examination of witnesses. He appeared as a man whose whole object in life was to procure justice for his client in this particular action. After that, the heavens might fall. The case was one in which the defendants, the Amalgamated Motor Omnibus Company, should have undoubtedly succeeded. But—by means of the

discreetly personal animus that he introduced in the matter, by means of a judiciously melodramatic speech to the jury—he succeeded in keeping their minds open.

The summing-up of Mr. Justice Tufnell really amounted to this:

“Gentlemen of the jury, you have heard the case. The plaintiff is a poor man. The defendants are a rich company. If, after the brilliant speech made by Mr. Meyville, you think that a thousand pounds is too small an amount to award as compensation for these injuries, say so. The matter lies with you.” He, however, omitted to mention his firm conviction that every motorist was a murderer.

The jury returned a grotesque verdict of £1,500.

Soon after Richard had returned to his chambers, his clerk asked if he could see Mr. Moseley.

“Who is Mr. Moseley?”

“He used to be clerk to Mr. Peploe.”

“Oh, yes, I know him. Good old John! Is *he* hard up?”

The clerk smothered laughter.

“Mr. Moseley hard up, sir? Why, he married twice—and married money each time. He is the richest clerk in the Temple.”

Richard endorsed his brief, and handed it to Jubb.

“Take that to Mr. Johnson’s chambers. Show Mr. Moseley in.”

“Yes, sir.”

The clerk shambled out.

“Ugh! what a room to work in!” said Richard, as he looked at the threadbare carpet, worn from blue to grey, the forty pounds’ worth of law-books that made a feeble show on the shelves, and the general air of poverty in the place. Warm with the triumph of

the morning, a sensation of chill seized him as he realised the dull drabness of his surroundings. He looked at himself in the glass above the mantelpiece. There was a red line where his wig had pressed on his forehead. He had not troubled to brush his hair in the robing-room at the Law Courts. His tie was askew.

"Hang it!" he commented, "I look over forty."

Then he sat down at the table and inspected the few thin briefs that lay upon it. They were nearly all other men's cases—about three days' hard work, and very little pay except experience.

Mr. Moseley, a rotund, middle-aged person, broad-shouldered and heavily built, with a jovial face and shrewd eyes—his large, thick nostrils made his nose seem shorter than it was—he looked like a rural dean in mufti, entered the room:

"Good-morning, sir."

"Good-morning, John. What can I do for you?"

"I've decided to come back to work."

"To work?" he asked, in surprise. "Haven't you made a fortune?"

"I haven't done badly, sir. But the Temple is the Temple. You can't get away from it. I was eight years with Mr. Ulmack. Before that I was with Mr. Banskin, K.C. You don't remember him, sir. When I was ten I was junior clerk to Mr. Justice Wilbraham, as he is now. And I can't somehow settle down outside the old place."

His experience was a not uncommon one. There is about the Temple something of the same fascination that the Universities exercise on the undergraduate. But Oxford and Cambridge are to us only stopping-places on the road of life. A young man who begins his career in the Temple works there till the day of

his death. It is a citadel of romance in a city of commerce. John Moseley had made in fees about £800 a year in the service of Theodore Ulmack, a fashionable "silk." Ulmack had died suddenly of heart trouble, assisted by ill-digested success—uninsured, having saved nothing, and leaving a wife and family dependent on the Barristers' Benevolent Association. Thereupon John, a widower without children, retired from the business and bought a villa at Chiswick. But the spell of the Temple was upon him. One day he looked in at the Law Courts to see his old friends. They were delighted to meet him, for he was almost an institution, known and respected by judges, law officers, and junior counsel, regarded as the apotheosis of success by the most juvenile of barristers' clerks, alert little fellows, like boy messengers out of uniform.

His visits became more frequent, till at last he attended regularly from the moment the Courts opened until they closed.

"Who is the lucky man who has secured your services?" asked Richard.

"Well, that is what I wanted to speak to you about. I thought, perhaps, you might take me on, sir."

"I! Good heavens!" Richard answered in astonishment. "I don't make three hundred a year. I hardly pay the ten guineas I guarantee Mr. Kendal's clerk out of my fees."

"I know, sir. But for the last six months I've seen you in Court, and, if I may say so, I admire your work. I'm a bit of a sportsman myself, and, if I may use the expression, I'll back you. You're bound to do well."

A look of amused pride came into Richard's face. This was a brilliant omen.

"Yes," the clerk continued, speaking seriously, almost with eagerness, "I've watched you, and I've watched other men. Lots of them start well, with backing and brains. They go up like rockets and then suddenly they disappear, and you never hear of them again. But you, sir—if you will pardon me—are going to be a big success if you stick to it."

"Thank you, John; it's very kind of you. But, as I've said, I can't afford you."

"May I sit down, sir?"

"Certainly."

Earnestly and rapidly John spoke:

"All the solicitors I know, and I know them all—all the good ones; and in the whole course of my career I have never taken in a brief that hasn't been paid for—say that they can't get hold of a first-class common-law junior. You're the man. I'm sure of it—sure as I sit here. If I was your clerk, I'd get you two thousand a year without—without standing a drink."

"But I've no money, no capital. I can't do it. I only pay £25 a year for this room and a share in the telephone. And there isn't accommodation in the place for another clerk."

"You must move."

"Don't talk about it. It's a delightful prospect. But it's not possible. In three years, perhaps."

"In three years' time the place may be taken. Now is the chance."

"I see the chance, John, but I don't see the possibility."

"May I explain it?"

"I wish you would."

"There's a good set of chambers on the ground floor at No. 14 in this court," said John. "They want a

hundred and twenty for it. Good airy room, good clerk's room, and two waiting-rooms. You *must* have two waiting-rooms."

"Why *must* I have two waiting-rooms?"

"Because there must always be someone waiting in the room the client isn't shown into."

"I see," answered Richard, with a smile.

"Then a decent lot of law books will cost three hundred pounds. Furniture and doing up, say a hundred and fifty. If I were you, sir, I shouldn't have *Vanity Fair* cartoons of judges. They're overdone. I should have nothing but books—and briefs. They are the best furniture for a barrister's room. I could pick up almost for nothing a library of showy, useless books."

"I have no doubt your views are entirely accurate, still——"

John interposed:

"I propose, if you will allow me, to set you up in these chambers—within the next fortnight."

The proposition was startling.

In his astonishment Richard rose from his chair. He gazed at the clerk as though questioning his sanity.

"Are you serious?"

"Absolutely. And I am serious in guaranteeing you two thousand pounds' worth of work before Christmas."

"Why should you do this for me?" he asked, still amazed at the unconventional proposition and the manner in which it had been placed before him.

"First, because you are the best man that I can see. A clerk's position is always a bit of a gamble. His governor may die, or his work may drop off, or he may take to drink—or a thousand and one things may

happen. For instance, he may make a mistake in his marriage. Or, worse still, he may appear in the Divorce Court. And that is the end of him. Besides, I want to make money—for a reason which I need not enter into. There is only one way of making money—speculation. I propose to speculate in the only thing I understand—the profession. If you accept my offer——”

“I should pay you back, of course. But I can give you no security.”

Recognising his advantage, Moseley seized it.

“I don’t *want* to be paid back. I want you to give me double the ordinary clerk’s fees for five years, and then my remuneration shall be on the usual scale.”

“Double fees might amount to—well, to a great deal of money if you were, so to speak, my impresario.”

“I hope so, I am sure, sir.”

For a minute Richard looked hard at the clerk. Then he said:

“I’ll do it.”

“I am very glad of it, sir. We shall be at Number 14 within a fortnight. We can give up this room at once, even if we have to make a slight loss. We can afford to do it.”

Richard smiled at the use of the word “we.” Already Moseley regarded himself in the light of a partner.

As John was turning to leave, his eyes glanced approvingly at a large stack of papers on a side-table.

“Excuse me, sir,” he said, as he looked eagerly at its bulk. His face fell when he saw it was the case of the Yoghi and Priscilla.

“I think you’re making a great mistake—if I may say so.”

"Of course you may say so. But why?"

"It can't do you any good. They're a dead case. I hope you don't intend to have a row with the judge. That sort of thing is played out. It never did a counsel any good yet, not in the long run."

"I don't intend to have a row with anybody. I intend to raise a point of law, and within half an hour the prisoners will be discharged."

"Might I inquire what the point of law is?" Moseley asked, somewhat sceptically.

"Certainly."

Richard explained it.

The clerk thought for a minute. Then he said decisively:

"No, sir. Fight the case for all it's worth. Cross-examine every witness at great length. Spin it out for a week or two weeks. Keep your name before the public. Let them read about you at breakfast, dinner, and tea. You are single-handed against the Solicitor-General and the Treasury counsel. And be very polite to the Solicitor-General. Then raise your point of law *afterwards*. This is a big thing. It will do for you what the Penge case did for Edward Clarke. Good-day to you, sir."

Having given this admirable advice, John went away, jubilant at the idea of returning to work.

He had not mentioned that the real reason of the partnership was his desire to increase his income for the benefit of his late master's family.

Except for the bare necessities of life, the brilliant Mr. Neville's widow and children were entirely dependent on John Moseley.

CHAPTER X

A DINNER PARTY

RICHARD had scarcely realised the importance of the good fortune that Moseley had brought him, when Jubb entered.

"Mrs. Ainslie wishes to speak to you on the telephone, sir."

He went into the clerk's room.

"Hello!"

"Is that you, Richard?"

"Yes."

"Do you love me as much as ever?"

"Fifty times as much."

"Sure?"

"Sure. Is that what you rang me up about?"

"No, darling. I want to kiss you."

"Nonsense, you can't by telephone."

"Come to dinner to-night—to make up sixteen—ten minutes early—before the other people. But I warn you dulness will reign. It's one of my duty dinners. No, come at a quarter-past eight."

"All right. Are you looking pretty to-day?"

"Normal, dear. I don't frighten the horses. By the bye——"

"What?"

"I worship you."

"Continue in that course, and all will be well."

"Am I your favourite person?"

"Absolutely. I prefer you to all others. I place you pretty high up in Class A."

"Be serious."

"No one could be more so."

"I don't know how it is, but you always sound so American through the telephone."

"It's an American invention."

"Do *I* sound American?"

"No, you sound like the flutter of angels' wings, accompanied by harps and rather loud cymbals. Does that please you?"

"No. Get back to your work. You seem in very good spirits to-day. Has anything happened?"

"Yes."

"Tell me."

"No, not now."

"Tell *me* first."

"I'm going to ring off."

"Are you sure I'm your favourite per——"

Smiling, he rang off. He was one of those persons who when telephoning employ as much facial expression as if the instrument were actually the recipient of the message.

Then he noticed that Jubb had been sitting in the room during this intellectual conversation.

"Confound you! I didn't know you were here." He hoped he had not been very idiotic. But the lovers had gradually invented a sort of code for affectionate conversation. Mrs. Ainslie had long ago established her claim to be regarded as Richard's "favourite person." She had also acquired a curious courtesy title, "Queen of all possible puss-cats," by which she set great store. These endearments sound nonsensical in cold print. But nowadays the language of love, in reaction against

the affectation of verse and the high-flown sentiment of romance, has become inane. No pair of lovers whose conversation was reproduced by a gramophone could hope to convince a Master in Lunacy that they were mentally sound. Richard, however, was pleased that in the hearing of Jubb he had not specified Gwendolen's exact position in cat circles. Still, the clerk had heard more than enough to convince him that Mr. Meyville and Mrs. Ainslie regarded one another with an affection superfluous in an unmarried couple.

Punctually at a quarter-past eight Richard was shown into the drawing-room in Green Street, where Wilfred received him with painful enthusiasm.

He rose laboriously from his chair.

"Glad you've come early, Richard. I want to have a word with you. It's right that you should know I am feeling far from well."

He made this statement with the air of one imparting a valuable diplomatic secret.

"What is it now?"

This formed a safe interrogatory. For Mr. Ainslie was liable to take grave offence if one inquired about his lumbago when he imagined that he was suffering from double dyspepsia, or about his asthma when nasal catarrh was the *carte du jour*.

With intense secrecy he answered:

"I don't know; frankly, I'm baffled. For the first time in my life I am *really* anxious about myself."

"I'm very sorry to hear it. What are your symptoms?"

Testily the host replied:

"Symptoms! What's the good of telling you my *symptoms*? I should have to explain the whole course of my disease. It is sufficient for you to know that I

don't understand what is the matter with me. I doubt if I shall be able to sit through dinner. If I can't manage it, you must be host. Don't you mention a word to anybody about how ill I really am. I don't want people to be alarmed."

Richard knew that Wilfred wished to give each of his guests a detailed account of his symptoms, in which he possessed a sort of copyright, so he promised not to mention the matter.

At this moment Gwendolen, accompanied by her Pekinese spaniel, "Keir Hardie," entered the room.

Dressed in a beautiful white satin gown, and wearing a necklace of emeralds, she was looking her best, and her triumphant bearing proved her complete satisfaction with herself. Yet she threw at her lover a glance asking for corroboration. Instantly she read enthusiastic approval in his eyes, and became a completely happy woman. He was pleased with her; he would be pleased with her dinner; he would like some of her guests. Obviously, therefore, he would be pleased with himself. To make her lover thoroughly pleased with himself is the ambition of every woman who loves—judiciously.

"I think I will go up and take a dose of pepsine," said Wilfred thoughtfully. "It is quite on the cards that I shall eat something at dinner that may disagree with me."

Gwendolen commended his forethought, which annoyed him a little.

He protested:

"Gwen, you are always talking as though I didn't take reasonable care of myself."

"My dear Willy, no one would ever reproach you on that account," she said soothingly. "The trouble you

take about yourself is really wonderful. Everybody wonders at it."

"I'm hanged if I'll be dictated to," he snapped with tetchy irrelevance. "If I don't understand my case, who does? Who the devil does? And to-day I begin to doubt whether even I do or not."

"Oh, Willy, you do. You know you do."

Then he went upstairs to dabble in medicaments.

"Do you think I look well, Richard, my Richard?"

"Queenly."

"Kiss me, please."

He took her firmly in his arms. She felt that he admired her and purred with contentment.

"Is there anything the matter with your husband, Mrs. Wilfred?"

It was often his whim, when holding her in his arms, to call her by her married name. A certain humorous piquancy was given to his usurpation of the husband's privileges by his politeness in addressing her as "Mrs. Wilfred."

She laughed, a happy, quivering laugh.

"Nothing. He will enjoy himself thoroughly to-night. He sits between Lady Vera Muffin and Mrs. Craven-Hill. They will listen to him. Each is a somewhat celebrated sufferer in her way. They will make a Trinity of internal troubles. But Willy will baffle them both completely. He's invented a lot of new ailments for next season."

"Really good Spring novelties?"

"The best he's ever had. But he's made a discovery of great importance. According to *The Lancet*, any man with one-tenth of his diseases is, *ipso facto*, dead. Willy is delighted at being, theoretically, a corpse."

"That's a cheery way to take one's pleasure!"

"Ah, but it's a great triumph for him, for this reason: his continued existence proves that Medical Science is a fraud."

"But do you mean to say, my dear, that there is nothing the matter with him at all?"

"Of course, no one can be really well who turns himself into a medicine-chest. And Willy is a perambulating drug-store. If he were to give up taking medicines, he would be as well as you or I. But then he'd have nothing to do. He's never had any profession or any hobby except this sort of hygienic suicide."

At length Willy returned with the resigned smile of a stout-hearted but hopeless sufferer. The leading sufferer of our day.

As the guests appeared his demeanour became pathetic.

"How are you, Mr. Ainslie?"

With ghoulisn glee, he answered:

"Worse than ever, thanks."

"Delighted to see you, Lady Vera; I'm terribly ill."

"You must excuse me, Lord Lashbridge, but I'm hardly in a condition to sit up at dinner."

"My dear Lady Pamela, I'm glad you're looking so well. I'm just able to come down to dinner. That is all. I hope to be well and strong in a year or two—with *great* care, but I doubt it."

And so on.

He behaved as though at any moment he might issue invitations to his funeral.

So depressing a man would never have been tolerated except for his wife—or as a joke.

Lord Lashbridge had described him as the grimmest jest in Mayfair.

Sir James Tufnell remarked to Richard:

"I believe our host would positively enjoy being sentenced to death."

"I think not, unless he could be present at the inquest."

Richard took down Lady Pamela l'Estocq, a beautiful fair girl, whom he had never met before. She had dreamy grey eyes, an exquisite complexion. Though her mouth was large, it was singularly expressive. Her hair, however, formed her most striking charm, and was arranged with apparently accidental art. The sudden interest excited in her eyes when he was introduced to her convinced him that she knew that he was to defend the Yoghi. It seemed to him more or less revolting that all girls should be more or less familiar with the main details of this appalling case.

Clearly she suppressed a question that was on the tip of her tongue. He was glad of it.

On his left sat Mrs. Cyrus B. Lough, one of the Americans who had discovered the intense inferiority of London to New York. She, it was, who had done all the neat things at Newport. She had invented the celebrated "Lunatic Dinner," at which all the guests were supposed to behave like lunatics. The success of their efforts in this direction had made the affair a triumph, and had even roused the envy of Mrs. Van-Astor-Gould. A "Tramp and Trianon" supper for millionaires disguised as tramps and millionairesses dressed in Watteau costumes had pleased many. Her "skunk" party, however, was her *chef d'œuvre*. She was so ultra-double-chinned that she appeared more than double-breasted.

In a loud voice, speaking with an accent like a banjo, she laid down the law in indifferent grammar on men

and things and cities. *Apropos* of theatres she said:

"No, I can't stand Cliftonville anyways. In the first place, he's got his eyes on one side of his face, and his nose on the other. And yet all the women flock to see him *en masse*, as the Roman Catholics say. I don't need to pay twenty dollars for a box to see Cliftonville. I can go into Marshall and Snclgrove's and see two hundred floor-walkers like him any day of the week. He's what you call over here a shop-walker, and that's all there is to him."

She had spoken rapidly, and her huge breast heaved like a sea of diamonds from the effort. There was an uncomfortable pause. No one even had the courage to point out that, following the custom of awkward pauses, it had occurred at precisely twenty minutes to the hour.

"My brother is a rather good actor in some parts," said Richard, willing to treat the matter fairly.

"I consider him the best actor on the English stage," Lady Pamela insisted, looking somewhat indignantly at the literally built American.

"Why!" said she. "Sakes alive! I'd no more idea, Mr. Meyville, that he was your brother than anything in the world! I'm real pained if I've said anything to hurt you."

"Not in the least, I assure you."

"Mind you, I like him personally. He's real refined in a drawing-room, but he don't know any more about acting than an emu knows about envelopes. So Cliftonville is not his real name?"

"No, it's the real name of a Margate hotel. I fancy my brother overlooked the fact when he adopted it."

Then Lady Pamela claimed his attention.

"I think I've seen your brother in every piece that

he's played in since I left school. He's perfectly fascinating."

She was deeply enamoured of Montague. In her boudoir there were no fewer than forty of his photographs, and she used no picture postcards that did not bear his portrait. To her girl friends she openly avowed her deep love for the actor.

The worship of an actor is among the most harmless outlets for a girl's affections. It is, of course, out of date, but it is not likely to be disastrous. Lady Pamela was one of the few *matinée* girls suffering from Picture-postkarditis to be found in the upper circles.

Gwendolen had told her that she would be taken down by Montague's brother, and it was on account of Richard's relationship to the proprietor of the Pall Mall Theatre that she had evinced so much interest on being introduced to him.

Throughout the dinner she talked of nothing but the actor. How often Richard saw him, and where and what his chambers were like, and the most trivial details of his life in Gloucester Terrace. But her questions were not put directly. She led Richard on to talk while keeping the conversation in the channel that alone interested her.

"My father knows Mr. Cliftonville very well, but I've never met him. You know, my father is very peculiar about some things. For instance, he will never have actors in the house."

"But Lord Lashbridge belongs to the Beefsteak," he said. "Aren't there some of them there?"

"I know, but I think he still holds the old 'rogue and vagabond' theory. Isn't it a shame? In some things he is so old-fashioned that he is ultra-modern. I must introduce you after dinner. I'm sure you'll like him."

At that moment Lord Lashbridge was talking to Lady Kytnow, the wife of Sir Andrew Kytnow, a politician who had obtained his baronetcy by a judicious combination of stupidity and Scotchness, on the strength of which he wore a full set of "Let-us-pray" whiskerettes. She was a specialist in liaisons. She had aptly been called the Divorce Court Debrett. She always knew what man was in love with what woman, and for what reason. Her own lack of experience had compelled her to take an interest in the affairs of other people. For it was not possible that she could ever have been fond of Sir Andrew Kytnow, who, as member for South Bayswater, had, even in the House of Commons, acquired such a reputation for dulness that it amounted almost to genius. And he was just as dull in private life. Also, she was so conspicuously plain that no word had ever been uttered against her reputation. Beautiful women are the players in the theatre of life. Plain women are the critics. They applaud the most indifferent actors. But they are very bitter in their condemnation of the actresses. They can "see nothing" in them! Lady Kytnow was one of those pessimistic dowagers who, having eaten of the Tree of Life, are now as goddesses, knowing only evil.

"It has been going on for three years—precisely three years in July. And nobody seems to mind." This she said a little severely, and not entirely accurately.

"Some women are not allowed to look over a hedge, I know," explained Lashbridge. "But I fancy the reason is that they look over it in such an offensive way. While other women are allowed to spend the entire winter on the other side of the hedge—at Monte Carlo or anywhere else—and no one cares twopence about it."

"And she's older than he is."

"A woman is as young as her lover can make her feel. Besides, how old is Mrs. Ainslie? Thirty-one?"

"Thirty-two, to be precise."

"By all means, let us arrive at precision. Young Meyville is, I take it, about thirty. I think their ages are most suitable. My son, Ventnor, is eighteen. He is in love with the Dowager Duchess of Roehampton. She is his senior by about thirty years. Still, she is a very well-preserved woman. And they tell me that she is quite desperately in love with him. However, I doubt whether anything will come of it. But, she has spoilt Ventnor's cricket. Last year," he continued as an explanation, "her presence at the Eton and Harrow match so embarrassed him that he failed to score."

Very bitterly and precisely Lady Kytnow interjected:

"The Dowager Duchess has been in love with my nephew, Captain Cardew, since February of last year."

"Since February! You astound me!"

"Yes; I saw them at the Palace Theatre together," she said, through tight-shut lips.

"Not alone!"

"There *were* other people in the box. But I was not deceived. I was in the box above. It was the fourteenth of February, my birthday," she said, as though that interesting fact made it worse. "I remember perfectly well."

Lady Kytnow had trained her memory to such a degree of discriminating perfection that she never forgot to forget anything pleasant about anybody.

"Good heavens!" said he, "you mustn't tell Ventnor. I am so delighted to hear that his case is hopeless."

He must never find out. Anything that keeps a boy—who will be a peer—away from the Gaiety is to be encouraged. I am not so ambitious as to hope that my boy will select his Countess from the chorus. But, tell me, you with your knowledge are sure to know, will this affair of Mrs. Ainslie's last?"

"I'm afraid it will."

Becoming more bitter, she added, apparently as an indictment:

"They are so extraordinarily happy."

"Yes, I should say they are well suited. They're both good-looking. She is charming, and the young man, they say, is going to rise. But how about Mr. Ainslie? What view does he take?"

"I oughtn't to tell you."

"Well, if he told you, surely you can tell me."

"He didn't."

She compromised and whispered.

"Oh, ah!" he laughed. "He's that sort of man, is he? Well, then nobody can object." Bending his head courteously, he said, "Except you, dear Lady Kytnow. You are privileged."

Pleased, but bewildered, the lady continued:

"Of course, she married him for his money. He has twenty thousand a year."

"Ah, but he squanders it on patent medicines."

"They are his one luxury," replied Lady Kytnow, who was always literal. "He's a great sufferer. He has talked to me by the hour about his sufferings. I doubt if he will be with us long."

"Nonsense. He always reminds me of Clement XIV., who poisoned himself by taking too many antidotes against poison. There's nothing whatever the matter with him. One of these days Mr. Ainslie will be too

seedy to take any medicine, and then he'll recover immediately."

Completely mystified, this delightful woman took refuge in an eminent Agnostic archdeacon on her other side.

When the ladies had left the table, Richard enjoyed a very gratifying sensation. Tufnell beckoned him to his side, and introduced him to Lord Lashbridge. Kytnow from across the table interrogated him on the Yoghi case in his most unintelligent House of Commons manner.

"Tell me, are these people guilty or not?"

"I'll tell you after the trial, Sir Andrew."

"I very much doubt whether you will," said Lord Lashbridge. "Suppose, by any possibility, you get your clients off, you're not going to admit the truth—that they are guilty."

"You may take it from me," Tufnell interrupted judicially, "that if they are acquitted they are more innocent than any middle-aged persons have ever yet succeeded in being."

"You don't give me much hope, Sir James," said Richard, as he lighted a cigar.

"I'd give 'em fifteen years each," replied the judge. "And if you get 'em off, which you won't, I'd give you penal servitude for life. Don't you think so? Yes."

And the judge leaned back in his chair, grunting heartily, for with him a grunt was the equivalent of boisterous laughter.

For half an hour the men sought from Richard verification of unreported details which were in circulation at the clubs. At last Wilfred rose dismally.

"All this makes me feel very ill," he announced. "Let us join the ladies."

On their way upstairs Lashbridge said, "Mr. Meyville, I'm coming to hear you in this case. I've got a couple of stalls—seats in the 'City Lands.' Will you return the compliment? I'm giving a dance on Friday of next week. Mrs. Ainslie's coming—and her husband, if his health permits. I should like you to see more of Ainslie. My daughter shall send you a card. You know I'm a widower."

"I assumed so."

"Why, may I ask?"

"There are some people who must be widowers. There are certain men who, at sight, you are sure must have survived their wives."

"What are their characteristics?"

"Frankly, I can't say. I've often wondered. Of course, the object of every smart woman is to be and to look a widow. Most of them succeed. But a widower is born—not made. You are, if I may say so, one of Nature's widowers."

Lashbridge looked curiously at Richard and then burst into a hearty laugh.

"By gad, so I am. I've always wondered what I was, and now I know. I'm one of Nature's widowers. And you—you're one of Nature's co-respondents. And I'm very glad that she—I mention no names—has found it out. The ideal co-respondent is born—and not cited."

His loose-limbed figure lunged forward with laughter as he opened the door of the drawing-room.

CHAPTER XI

"A COLD WOMAN"

Mrs. AINSLIE rose to receive the men.

"What have you got to say?" asked Lashbridge.

"Nothing, except that I'm glad to see you again."

"Number three. I congratulate you."

"How do you mean?"

"You are the third hostess this season who has not welcomed us with that terribly depressing question, 'Well, have you settled the affairs of the nation?' "

Immediately every man looked guilty—as though he had purposely and of malice aforethought concealed the only possible solution of the Free Trade question.

"But I always ask that," said Lady Kytnow, slightly befogged.

"You, dear Lady Kytnow, *you* are privileged. Such an interrogation is expected from you. Your husband is a legislator, who will shortly, I trust, be in the Lords. Only the other day Lord Wiltshire, during an exceedingly dull debate, said to me, 'Why haven't we got Kytnow in the Lords? We must have him; the atmosphere would be congenial.' "

"I must tell my husband that, dear Lord Lashbridge. He will be delighted to hear what you've said. Andrew, my dear——"

She summoned her husband to her side and confided Lord Lashbridge's compliment to Sir Andrew's watch-chain as he stood panting above her.

Meanwhile, Gwendolen was imperceptibly arranging her guests in suitable groups, but she found occasion to whisper:

"Richard, stay to the end."

He nodded.

To requests that she should sing she answered:

"The amateur is a thing of the past. We are all professionals nowadays—or nothing. No man who can write a decent letter ever does so. He writes an 'advice on evidence,' is it, Mr. Meyville? or an article on the deterioration of British blotting-paper. And we all hate hearing people sing, unless we've paid to hear them do it."

"That is perfectly true," said Sir James, who had the courtesy to agree discourteously with her. "Professionalism has killed even games. The ordinary man is a fool if he takes a hand at bridge, or tennis, or croquet. Everything that is done nowadays is done for a living. Is it so, or is it not? Of course it is."

But Lashbridge, who had a genuine admiration for her voice, and an incipient admiration for herself, led her to the piano.

"What shall I sing?"

"That dismal song about—you, please."

"About me? Oh, you mean the Lady Gwendolen song. I sincerely trust it has nothing to do with me."

Her voice was exquisitely tender and pure. The words were those of the ordinary drawing-room ballad, but they had been set to charming music by Reggie Turner, the composer who was an intimate friend of hers. The song was a great favourite of Gwendolen's, and, somehow—perhaps in a measure because of her friendship for the composer—she had developed a sentimental sympathy for the unfortunate heroine. Though

it was a man's song, she seemed to sing as though it were a prophetic poem about herself.

THE GARDEN OF ROSES

*Here in my garden of roses
Roses are crimson and white,
Roses that breathe in their fragrance
Incense of Earth's delight.*

*Fairer than all the flowers
Twined round the hearts of men,
Sleeps in my garden its mistress,
My Lady Gwendolen.*

*Stark in my garden of roses
That sigh with the summer's breath,
Bearing his scythe for the harvest,
Standeth the Reaper—Death.*

*His scythe shall reap no flowers
Grown in the fields of men.
The Reaper has marked in his reaping
My Lady Gwendolen.*

*Grief in my garden of roses
Cometh to every rose,
They bury their heads in sorrow
Watching her blue eyes close.*

*Their leaves they scatter as tear-drops
To hide from the gaze of man,
In a scented shroud of rose-leaves,
My Lady Gwendolen.*

The simplicity of the setting was a perfect medium for the singer's voice. A few chords sounded light and

warm. You felt the fragrant life of the flowers, the perfume of white roses in the twilight. The first part of the melody expressed the poetry of passion, the proud contentment of love. Softly and tenderly she sang, as though fearful of disturbing the sleeper in her paradise of flowers. Then sad minor chords were struck, and the melody died away in a perfumed agony.

Grief had come to every rose, and the singer's voice sank lower and lower, as though subdued by relentless Death. With the last chord fell the last petals of the roses.

When she had finished, Lashbridge thought he saw the glimmer of tears in her eyes as she darted a glance in the direction of Richard. He, however, was talking in a low voice to Pamela.

Mrs. Ainslie declined to sing again, and rose from the piano.

Lady Kytnow was, for the moment, completely at the mercy of Wilfred's latest bulletins. While Richard seemed absorbed in conversation, Gwendolen took Lord Lashbridge to interview the spaniel in front of the fireplace.

"He shall perform now," she said. "Keir, what do you do when you're bored?"

The dog (who was called "Keir," after the eminent patriot and politician, either because he was so conspicuously dressy or because he was worth his weight in gold) instantly died.

After Keir's resurrection, Lashbridge inquired:

"What do you do for a knighthood?"

Keir sat up and begged.

Everybody roared with laughter at the extremely intelligent and over-dressed appearance of the dog. Lashbridge protested:

"I hate seeing a dog perform. It degrades him to the level of an actor."

At her father's words an indignant flush spread over Pamela's face, a flush so admirably becoming that Richard stared inquisitively at her, a fact noted by Gwendolen.

It seemed that her face became pallid against the dead black of her hair. As if by instinct the guests appeared to realise that this was the moment to leave. A rustle as of cold wind went through the room.

Sir James Tufnell, on the point of departure, said to Richard:

"I congratulate you on the way you won the running-down case to-day."

"Pardon me, Sir James," he answered with somewhat tactless tact in allusion to the judge's summing-up. "It was you who won the case."

"Eh? It was a peculiar coincidence that as I was driving down to the Courts this morning my carriage was nearly run into by one of the vehicles of that infernal Amalgamated Omnibus Co."

"It was a very fortunate coincidence."

Tufnell grunted.

"By the way, you know O'Brien is going to try the Yoghi case next week. I spoke to him about you. He'll give you every chance. He doesn't like the Solicitor-General. You know he's not too fond of Irishmen."

"But he's Irish himself!"

"That's the reason. Do Irishmen ever love one another? I doubt it. Good-night to you."

Everything was going wonderfully well for Richard.

After the guests had left, he found Gwendolen in the dining-room drinking lemonade. In a dry tone that she had never used to him before, she said:

"Don't go. I want to speak to you."

At that moment Wilfred came in, jubilant:

"I've never enjoyed myself so much in my life. Charming woman, Lady Vera Huffin! And Mrs. Craven-Hill is as sympathetic as she is sensible. I interested them very much."

Clearly, Wilfred was full of conversation. Having conversed for three hours about his internal economy—which really amounted to extravagance—he proposed to "make a night of it." He felt in training for doing justice to his sole topic.

"You can go to bed, dear. I want to have a talk with Richard."

She saw the necessity of yielding, said good-night, and went out of the room.

Instantly Wilfred plunged into his favourite subject:

"I'm terribly ill. I'm the last person to alarm people, as you know. But, Richard, it is well that you should be aware of my position. For years I have devoted myself to studying my case. And now I am completely at fault."

With intense eagerness he leaned forward as he said:

"To-night I ate a couple of slices of ham cooked in champagne. I don't why I did it—I suppose I was interested in Mrs. Craven-Hill's conversation about the properties of Lithia water. In the ordinary course of things I should be in excruciating agony. But I feel no pain."

"Surely you don't complain of that? You are very hard to please, Wilfred."

"I don't *complain*. Heaven knows, I never complain. But I'm alarmed! Alarmed!"

"But why? What's the good of worrying because

you feel well? You may get accustomed to it. And, in time, you may even grow to like it."

"But I've no business to feel well! Don't you see if my liver was all right, I couldn't possibly feel well. My organs have ceased to work. I am at a standstill. This is the beginning of the end. Before long the action of the heart will cease."

The young man looked curiously at him. Wilfred clearly would never be convinced that he was suffering from nothing but the "Medicine Habit," a vice as dangerous as alcoholism, cocainism, or the practice of taking morphia. A man who is his own doctor has a corpse for his patient.

Evidently on the subject of his imaginary ailments Wilfred was as mad as a Mullah.

Deliberately he said:

"I shall not last much longer. All my affairs are in order. Everything goes to Gwendolen. She'll be a rich woman, but she deserves it, in a way. Now this is what I want to speak to you about. I don't want you to marry Gwendolen."

Richard rose in astonishment.

"Let's talk about that in ten years' time. I've no idea—"

"Of course you haven't. But she's very fond of you. She likes you better than anybody else. But I warn you against her."

"Indeed! Why?" asked the other in surprise.

Mysteriously, with outstretched hands vibrating from excitement, Wilfred explained:

"My wife's a most awfully cold woman. She's an iceberg. She doesn't know what love is."

Richard suppressed a smile at the husband's strange hallucination.

"I see you're surprised. Naturally you don't know. Nobody would guess. She's a splendid creature, brilliant, beautiful! No one admires my wife more than I. But, mark you, not as a wife."

In that capacity he dismissed Gwendolen with a snap of the fingers.

"No one knows more about women than I do. They are the only things in which I take an interest. I've studied them all, every sort, everywhere—France, Japan, Italy, San Francisco, Port Said." Then, quite calmly, but with a pathetic shake of the head, he stated, "I should have married an Andulasian woman."

"Do you know many Andulasian women?"

"All of them!"

"Surely not *all* Andulasian women? There must be several hundreds, surely?"

"No, no, I don't know each individual, but I know all the types. Of course, a man of my temperament could never be entirely happy, from a matrimonial point of view, in this country. I should have been a Pasha."

"Really?"

"Certainly. I have often thought of settling five thousand a year on Gwendolen, and going to live in Constantinople."

The weedy little man, excited by the idea, walked jerkily about the room.

"It's too late now, of course. But that would have saved me. Now, look at my constitution. What is it? Nothing. I can't blame Gwendolen, in a way. But I don't want a man like you, whom I am fond of, to have his life ruined as mine has been."

If Richard had believed a word of this improbable harangue he would have seen pathos in his shivering host anxiously, unselfishly warning him against happi-

ness. But he had his reasons for placing no faith in any single one of the statements.

His object was to get out of the house—without laughing. Apparently, Wilfred, by some system of auto-suggestion, had evolved a sentimental side to his disorders. With women he knew that such a state of things was common; he was aware that many matrons of Bayswater regarded illness itself as a form of romance, that in their minds conversation on the subject occupied the place held by amours in the minds of the more skittish and less matronly mothers of Mayfair.

Mr. Ainslie's obsession was so comical that it could not be serious.

Richard prepared to leave.

"I say, Wilfred, I'm truly sorry to hear all this," he said, with a successful assumption of gravity. "You've given me a piece of advice. May I give you one? Put yourself on a strict diet of no drugs for a week and see how you get on."

"Fatal! Fatal!" cried the other, throwing up his hands.

"Try it! At present your body is a sort of battle-field for various divisions of the pharmacopœia. Have a week off, and let things settle down a bit."

"It would be a complete change of treatment. I don't think I could risk that. Not at present, at least. I'll think it over. It's a new idea."

Eventually Richard left, having extracted a promise that the new treatment should be seriously considered.

CHAPTER XII

THE DEFENCE OF THE YOGHI AND PRISCILLA

MUCH against her will, Gwendolen came to the conclusion that she was vaguely jealous. She did not, of course, believe for a moment that Richard might fall in love with Pamela. She had no reason to suppose that he felt any particular interest in the girl. But she was for the first time definitely conscious of the possibility that he might eventually grow tired of her. Hitherto their happiness had been complete, for each was convinced of the other's loyalty. She could not remember a single occasion on which he had told her anything that was not actually true. He had never, to her knowledge, paid the slightest attention to any other woman. On all subjects that had interest for him he had taken her into his confidence. Even the slightest, as well as the gravest, anxieties of his life had, she firmly believed, always been laid before her. It is the privilege of love, and, indeed, one of the causes of its great popularity as an institution, that lovers need speak about nothing but themselves. Still, the lover prefers to dilate on such matters as reveal him in a favourable and, if possible, a triumphant light. And Gwendolen remembered with satisfaction many little details, both with regard to himself and his home-life, which were mean and petty, and would only have been related to a woman from whom nothing was concealed and whose sympathy was certain.

Jealousy was a new experience for her. She regarded it as unnecessary and, indeed, dishonourable to her love. The idle excuse that a woman makes for being jealous—that “It shows how much I love you”—had never occurred to her. A contract to love is like any other contract. It is terminable after due notice or by adequate compensation. But to receive cash from A, and to pretend to him that you are supplying to him the goods which you are actually supplying to B, is roguery.

This was an illustration of Richard's, who regarded love from a common-sense point of view. (He firmly believed that passion could be satisfactorily regarded in such a way.)

“My dear Gwendolen,” he had said—he had said it in a punt during a very charming day on the river—“if ever you get jealous of me, I shall regard it as a symptom of your decrepitude, or as an insult to me—whichever you like. Either your power of judgment will be failing, or you will be accusing me of dishonesty. You do not show your confidence in your trustee if you suggest that he is embezzling your trust funds.”

She knew that he was absolutely honest. But how could he—more than another—permanently control his heart?

On the day after the dinner-party she reflected on the jealousy question, and decided to dismiss it as futile. But just as a man who considers the possibility of being in love ends by loving, so a woman who ponders on whether or no she has cause for jealousy is bound to become jealous.

Two days passed. She had no word from him. Several times she failed to reach him by the telephone. Common-sense told her that it would be ridiculous to

write and tell him that she was jealous. But if she put pen to paper, she felt that she must deal with the subject. She wired, asking him to call at certain definite times. He answered that he was engaged.

On the following Monday (in a new dress) she drove down to the Temple.

Pioneered by her groom, she mounted several flights of stairs, and was privileged to converse with Jubb. She did not care for Jubb. He was horribly untidy and perfumed with attar of alcohol. Also, he said that Richard was not in.

"Where is he?"

"At the Old Bailey."

"When will he be back?"

"I couldn't say."

"Where are his chambers?"

"Here, madam."

Jubb showed her, petulantly jingling the ruby-studded vanity-case that hung from her wrist, into Richard's miserable little room. Bewildered, she stared at the clerk:

"I asked for his chambers—where he works. This, I presume, is the box-room. But there aren't even boxes in it."

Jubb became irritable. Incompetent though he was, he had a full share of the barrister's clerk's loyalty to his master.

"This is where he does his work! There are the briefs."

The semi-romantic interest that exists in the feminine brain in connection with the term "brief" was dispelled in Gwendolen's mind when she looked at the long white sheets of doubled paper tied with red tape. The interest a loving woman feels in the surroundings of

that part of her lover's life in which she has no share received a severe shock.

"Do you mean to say that Mr. Meyville works *here*?"

"Certainly he does. Why shouldn't he?"

"How can he? The place is filthy."

She put her white-gloved hand on the wainscoting, and when she drew it away the fingers were black.

Disgusted, she drew off the glove and threw it into the waste-paper basket.

"Surely there is some mistake," she said at last. "I thought Mr. Meyville had chambers. This is—well, I don't know what it is. But it is unlike anything I have ever seen."

Her surprise was so evident, her beauty was so striking, that Jubb pardoned her ignorance.

"You don't seem to understand, milady—"

"I am not 'my lady.' I am Mrs. Ainslie."

"Oh, it's you that telephones!" he said, beginning to understand the reason of the visit of the most beautiful creature with whom he had ever conducted a conversation face to face. "We've often had words, you and me. You're '2835 Mayfair'! I thought I knew your voice."

Gwendolen smiled graciously.

"I am the Mayfair you mention."

"You see, mum, with barristers, even if they'd only got a third share in a room like this, they call it their chambers."

"Then a room of this size may really be three distinct sets of chambers?"

"Certainly; and often is."

"Are you sure you know? You're the caretaker, I presume?"

The clerk was too indignant at the ignominious

suggestion to make a suitable reply. He stood speechless.

The conversation terminated abruptly. Gwendolen, escorted by the groom, descended the perilous stairs.

Peering through the still open door, Jubb muttered furiously:

"A trollop—nothing more nor less than a trollop. Me a caretaker! Oh, my Gawd!"

Gwendolen was touched to the heart by the poverty of Richard's room. To her temperament, beautiful and luxurious surroundings were necessities of life. As Miss Paxton-Pryce, she had found her father's hideous house in Queen's Gate intolerable, and had married Wilfred chiefly because his wealth would enable her to live in the atmosphere which was absolutely necessary to her contentment. Just as some women are properly fated to spinsterhood, so Gwendolen had been constructed by nature to be a rich man's wife. It was, therefore, with a shock that she discovered the squalid conditions of Richard's life. No wonder he was struggling with all his strength to reach success! And she regarded the fact that he had never hinted how depressing were the surroundings of failure as a mark of delicate consideration on his part. The most simple services are often the most highly rewarded. A very slight act of consideration frequently appeals with extraordinary force to a woman. Gwendolen felt unusually in love with Richard and proportionately jealous of Pamela. Although she was proud of his love, she considered it preposterous that he should dream of aspiring to the hand of Pamela, whom, with very natural contradiction, she thought entirely unworthy of him.

On the next day again there was no news. From

Jubb, whose enmity she did not for a moment suspect, only evasive telephonic replies could be obtained. Richard was in London! Why could she never see him?

On Wednesday the papers were full of him and his conduct of the Yoghi case. On Thursday he was almost a celebrity.

Her lover had become a mere topic of conversation, like Free Trade or the Nonconformist Conscience. But she hadn't seen him for nearly a week. He was public property.

As a matter of fact, Richard had never felt the slightest suspicion of her jealousy. He had been very busy with his big case and in arranging to move into his new chambers. In moments of successful effort love slips unnoticed out of a man's life.

On the evening of Gwendolen's visit to the Temple, he had arranged with Kendal to give up his "chambers"—much to the annoyance of Jubb, who, having regarded Richard as a good investment, promptly circulated the report that he was being financed by a lady in easy circumstances and of palpably easier virtue.

With regard to the Yoghi case, everything was going well. The two peculiar defendants had behaved in court with an eccentricity that had never previously been exhibited in the Old Bailey.

The Yoghi appeared in the ordinary evening-dress of a conjuror, while Priscilla, an extremely stout lady, wore a purple toga and a complete yellow wig, like a beehive; she also carried a "property" olive branch in her hand, and devoted much time to silent prayer. On occasions, in spite of her counsel's remonstrances, she insisted on talking to the judge in the manner of a Christian Scientist.

The Yoghi himself said neat things about judges in general, the next world, and "matter." Matter, he maintained, was not matter, and, apparently, truth consisted solely of unintelligible jargon. His language was of such cryptic complication as is only employed by the followers of Mrs. Mary Baker G. Eddy.

When called upon to plead, he had stated:

"There is no such thing as guilt. For guilt implies sin. A tree can last for hundreds of years. And I, being a man of higher order of creation than a tree, can, without sin, live for ever."

"The anticipation of unusual longevity," said Sir Stephen O'Brien, the judge, "is no answer to a criminal charge." (For two *obiter dicta* this intelligent person will ever be famous: "I hate Presbyterians as much as anybody; still, they are entitled to justice"; and "All barristers are subsidised liars.")

He then instructed the Clerk of Arraignment to enter a plea of "Not Guilty."

But the prisoners protested against that course. It was almost impossible to satisfy the Yoghi and Priscilla.

The judge rebuked them.

"Your defence is now in the hands of a very able counsel, and you must keep silence while he conducts it and calls your witnesses, if you have any."

"The Lord is our witness," answered the Yoghi.

"Your counsel will exercise his discretion as to whom he places in the witness-box."

Then the trial began. In spite of the revolting nature of the evidence and the seriousness of the charge, the extraordinary demeanour of the prisoners, their violent outbursts, and their sudden adjournments for prayer caused considerable merriment. Apart from

its intrinsic indecency, the case attracted additional attention because, at the moment, there was nothing of general interest in the newspapers. The country was not in danger of war with anybody; all Mullahs were inexplicably sane; diabolism and Christian Science had gone out of fashion; and nothing had as yet taken their place as a topic of drawing-room conversation.

So the maxims of the Yoghi and Priscilla, and the strenuous cross-examination of Mr. Meyville, completely engrossed the public mind. Crowds besieged the Old Bailey; the court was thronged with celebrities, whose presence was daily chronicled in the Press as if the occasion were the *première* of a new play. One of the evening papers even issued a special Yoghi edition, full of bad likenesses of the prisoners, witnesses, and counsel, with as much of the evidence as was printable. The public took the view that the defendants were mad, but that their form of insanity should be treated with penal servitude for life.

At length, on Friday afternoon, the case for the Crown, after occupying four days, was concluded. Richard rose in a complete hush of intense interest as to his line of defence.

"My lord," said he in substance, "I find myself suddenly in a position to prove that the defendants are husband and wife. They cannot, therefore, be indicted for conspiracy. I can give you the authorities, my lord. But your lordship is well aware of them. There is no other indictment on the record."

The judge was completely taken by surprise. The counsel for the Crown could not assist him.

In an astounded and indignant court, Richard proved the fact that the Yoghi and Priscilla had been united in holy matrimony.

Nothing could be done. Amazement reigned. The judge, rightly or wrongly, directed a protesting jury to return a verdict of "Not Guilty."

And Richard left the Old Bailey a celebrated man, but soundly hissed by an outraged public.

CHAPTER XIII

CARLTON HOUSE TERRACE

ON that evening Lord Lashbridge's house in Carlton House Terrace was crowded. He stood, with Pamela, at the head of the double staircase receiving his guests, not free from pleasure in the indescribable atmosphere of excitement which proves that one's entertaining is successful. A constant stream of gleaming shoulders and glittering jewels and fluttering dresses passed him. In most minds there was a topic of absorbing interest, a subject on which ideas could be exchanged.

It adds considerably to the animation of a dance if in the course of the day an event, be it even a disaster, has occurred. Dowagers conversed eagerly with each other. Non-dancing men, grouped about doors, whispered items of information, for the most part entirely inexact, with regard to the unpublished evidence in the case of the day. Only the marriageable maidens and unmarried spinsters refrained from giving voice to reflections on the trial. With cordial courtesy, Lashbridge bent over Gwendolen's hand.

"I congratulate you most heartily," he said, as though she herself had conducted the defence. "But you mustn't keep Mr. Meyville to yourself to-night. I must introduce him to everybody—who may be useful. All sorts of terrible people are useful to barristers. You see I take a great interest in him—for your sake."

"But is he coming here to-night?" she asked in astonishment, as a gleam of delight came into her eyes.

"Certainly. Didn't you know? At least, he accepted. Of course, I didn't put on the cards 'Dancing and Mr. Richard Meyville.' I only asked him the other night at your house."

The happiness so palpably shining in her face precluded the supposition that her ignorance of his movements was caused by an estrangement.

Failing that, she certainly had her host's sympathy. She expressed her desire to see Richard. So Lashbridge kept her by his side in order that she might meet him immediately on his arrival. Wilfred passed on to report his condition to friends and acquaintances. In the intervals of receiving his guests, Lashbridge talked gaily to Gwendolen.

"Your husband," he said smiling, "is getting more and more medical. I really think Mr. Meyville faces his prescriptions nobly. But will it last? You know that Lord Snelbody was compelled to break it off with Lady Snelbody because Freegrove could talk nothing but golf."

"I think that a husband should have a hobby—something to occupy his mind."

"Perhaps. *Hobbies for Husbands*, brought out in a convenient and not too costly form, would be a useful hand-book. But, as a matter of fact, being a husband at all ought to be a most engrossing hobby; I mean—being a husband to a charming woman." And he bowed.

"I've always heard, Lord Lashbridge, that you were a great success as a husband."

"Oh, yes, I think I may say so. I was much complimented. But I gave my mind to it. Still, in our

day the art of being a husband seems completely lost. We have no husbands, no painters, no architects nowadays. But I hear that our co-respondents are quite admirable. It should be the object of all thinking women to marry co-respondents."

"But, unfortunately, you cannot get a character with a co-respondent as you can with a cook."

"Ah, Monkey Brand, my dear fellow, how are you? Let me introduce the Marchese di Fedine. You will find the Marquis a most dangerous acquaintance."

The Ambassador, a tiny man, wonderfully bald, apparently with three huge black eyebrows—so thick that they seemed to be made of *chenille*—the third on his upper lip, was the most completely dressed man in the world. His gold eyeglass, worn in his right eye, was balanced by the huge "Galloway" Malmaison in the lapel of his coat. Buttonholes were not worn at the time. But the Marquis wore everything. So conspicuously ornate was he that "Sem" had caricatured him with two buttonholes and a couple of single eye-glasses. He was a brilliantly clever man, and immensely popular in the best Society—both Royal and Hebrew—which is very much the same thing.

Volubly he began:

"Delightful. I adore this house. It is a palace that is also a home. There is an atmosphere that one finds nowhere else. One sees a difference. What is it? I don't know."

Gwendolen smiled.

"Look round," she said, "don't you notice anything strange?"

"No, assuredly. But I detect the absence of something. But what? I am puzzled."

"Do you see any eagle noses?"

Lashbridge, who had overheard this conversation, laughed.

"There isn't a Jew in the place. I don't like them. They are not the right shape. They are not necessary."

"You amaze me," said the Marquis diplomatically.

Nothing is more pleasant than to feel that one has amazed a Diplomat, for Ambassadors affect universal knowledge.

"Lord Lashbridge," Gwendolen explained, "is the last of the Anti-Semites."

"I would willingly become the President of a Society for the Revival of Jew-Baiting in this country," said Lashbridge. "Things are going too far. It is even maintained that the lions on the Royal Standard are the lions of Judah, and that our next ironclad is to be called H.M.S. 'Moses.' Still, I'm afraid I'm before my time. It will only be when the Jews buy up the land that the English will wake to their peril."

"Eh?" answered the Marquis, "but you have made one exception to your rule. Isn't that Theo Rothschild over there?"

"But he is not a Jew," said Gwendolen.

"Surely an ancestor of his founded the fortune of his house by doing a deal in crucifixion seats!" exclaimed the Marquis. "Whenever a popular execution took place in Judea he bought up the best seats."

"Nothing of the sort," Gwendolen explained. "That is a mere myth. His real name is Robinson. But he changed it in order to have some chance of making money on the Stock Exchange."

Di Fedine, somewhat mystified and aggrieved, said to Lashbridge:

"For an Englishman, it seems to me that your dislike of the Jews is absolutely unpatriotic."

Then he led Gwendolen to the ball-room. A celebrated expert in women, he showed plainly that he admired her. He was one of those foreigners with whom the cult of women is a substitute for athletics. His admiration pleased Gwendolen, for it convinced her that she should assuredly find favour in her lover's sight.

Voluble and witty, Di Fedine talked *choses et autres*, and under the spell of his animated conversation his ugliness seemed to vanish and become merely an attractive mannerism. She began to understand his wonderful success with women. But he noticed, considerably to his annoyance, that her eyes were furtively directed to the door, and he interpreted these glances:

"Can it be possible that he keeps you waiting? It is unforgivable. No, there he is!"

At that moment she caught sight of Richard in the centre of a group of men.

"What makes you think—?"

"Am I right? I hope so. In this event I congratulate you both. I was in the Court to-day, and I wondered what sort of woman he loved. As he came in, he saw us. He did not look as though he liked me enough to leave me money in his will. It is therefore clear that he loves you. *Voilà tout!* Simple, is it not? But I am keeping him away. He is saying to himself, '*Tiens*, who is the ugly devil talking to the beautiful Mrs. Ainslie?' There is a proverb all about me in this country. Your young men say 'Beauty and the Beast!' always. But I make comical pleasantry and reply, 'No, *mon cher*, I'm not so good-looking as all that, and I must beg of you not to make insult of the lady in my presence,' *Ça, ce n'est pas banal?*'"

Gwendolen complimented him on the comicality of the pleasantry he had made, and saw, much to her annoyance, that more men were clustering around Richard. Amongst them Lord Essie Marriott, a young man who waggled as he walked, was obviously telling the barrister all about the case.

"Essie is a Middlesex man, is he not?" asked the Marquis.

"I have no conception where he was born," she answered, fanning herself languidly; and he did not pursue the matter. With great pleasure, Gwendolen noticed that people were pointing her lover out to one another. But she realised that his celebrity was keeping him away from her. This, she felt, with an almost pleasant pang, was symbolically ominous.

The Marquis continued to prattle. She hardly heard him. Would Richard never come? At last he crossed the room, and she introduced him to Di Fedine, who, with the air of one who is privileged to share a secret, no matter how public, immediately withdrew, after cordial congratulations. With a sigh of complete happiness Richard sat down by her. His eyes shone brightly, and a smile was on his lips. The miracle of success was upon him.

"I have just seen Wilfred. He is leaving, and he asked me to take you home. May I?"

"Of course. Excuse my pressing your hand—but I'm so, so glad to see you again. It's over a week. You've become famous. And you've forgotten your—Queen of Kittens."

"Never, my God, never!" he answered, fervently pressing her hand. Then he smiled. "It was awfully kind of you to put your glove in my waste-paper basket. That was the sweetest thing you have ever done."

The fact that he still took delight in the merest trivialities of affection proved to her that he was completely in love.

"And I have been jealous," she said, as though making a confession.

"My darling, you're as perfect as it's possible for a frail woman to be," he answered smiling. "I forgive you all your faults. If you like being jealous, I sha'n't stand in your way. But I won't do anything simply to make you jealous."

"Never?"

"Not this side of Jordan. I'm longing—to kiss you."

"I'm still your favourite person?"

"I worship you."

She could feel his breath on her neck as he whispered:

"It's a week since I've kissed you."

"It seems more."

"Sure?"

"Kindly do not cross-examine me. Will you come in to supper?"

"On one condition. That you take me home immediately after."

He gladly granted her terms. But Lashbridge would not let him go. He must be introduced to Lord Wiltshire, an honour impossible to decline. Introduction led to introduction. Only at half-past three, when it was too late for him to go to Green Street, did they leave Carlton House Terrace. This was a great disappointment to Gwendolen. But his tenderness to her as she nestled at his side in the motor, formed something of a consolation.

Noiselessly the electric brougham glided through the empty streets.

"This is happiness," she said, in a whisper of contentment. "You are so wonderful and so clever. You make me afraid. Say that we shall always be happy, darling?"

"Always and always."

"But you don't tell me that often enough. I don't think you quite realise what an exquisite joy it is for a woman to be *told* that she is loved. I like to be told it again and again, because I know that you have never lied to me. And I'm sure you never will. You couldn't look me in the eyes and say that you were still the same if another woman were taking you away?"

"There will never be another woman. Besides loving you, I like you. It seems a commonplace sort of thing to say, little girl. But passion is all the better for being founded on common-sense."

"No, it isn't. That's just where you're wrong. If common-sense told you that it was imprudent for you to love a married woman—and I am married in a way, you know—would you break it off?"

Although she knew there was but one answer possible, she attached great importance to his answer. She scented danger to herself lurking in his success.

"And I want to say this for myself, Richard. I haven't stood in your way up till now. And I must ask you to remember that when common-sense begins to say horrid things about me."

"My darling, there is no danger. You are indispensable to me."

The word "indispensable" gave her more pleasure than a million compliments or words of loving praise. It was a "common-sense" declaration. But anxious as she was to be reassured of his affection, she took

equal pleasure in dilating upon the depth of her love for him.

"Without you I couldn't exist. If you were to tire of me I should kill myself—I should die."

All women who have loved have made this statement, firmly believing in its truth. The miracle of love has come into their lives. By love they live. And without love they are assured that death follows automatically; for their consolation there is no prudent proverb, pointing out in proverbial fashion the eternal truth of the absolutely obvious. The fact that a woman has loved one man proves her capacity for loving another. Primarily, we are in love with love; in a secondary degree with another person. *Qui a aimé, aimera.*

She persisted:

"You must never give me up. You have taught me love. Each has learnt love from the other. It would be treason for you to abandon me."

"There is no fear for the future, my darling. Everything is going well with me—and it is all through you."

He spoke very tenderly under the spell of her beauty, her tenderness.

"You will never, never give me up—not for anything?"

"Who was it," he laughed, with his arm about her, "who discovered that a woman was a cross between an angel and an idiot? Which are you—chiefly?"

"I was an angel once. I may be an idiot later. But I'm a woman now. Don't you notice it?"

Glorying in her self-surrender, she threw her arms about him, and covered his lips with kisses. Her cloak had slipped from her shoulders, and the gleaming white of her skin held him rigid with emotion.

"There has never been anything so sweet in all the world," he said, between the kisses. He breathed her perfume. "You are wonderful, and I worship you."

He turned out the light—in the silence she felt that his love was altogether hers.

CHAPTER XIV

MRS. AINSLIE AND THE PARTNERSHIP

THE next day Richard was installed in his new chambers at No. 14 Essex Court. With almost paternal pride, Moseley pointed to the shelves, well-filled with imposing volumes, admirably selected. There were two rows of handsome leather bindings which at once attracted Richard's eye. The clerk, in reply to a questioning glance, answered:

"No, sir, they aren't any use. They're completely out of date. But they make a capital show—a sort of shop window, so to speak. Three pounds the lot I paid for them. But the other books are all up to date, and I managed to get them very, very cheap."

A rich but sombre carpet lay on the floor beneath a couple of good tables and a set of solid chairs in black oak and red leather.

"Second-hand," said Moseley, in a tone that implied a compliment. On one table lay four bulky briefs representing fees of over three hundred guineas. They came from firms of very high standing.

"Not so bad to begin with, sir."

"Bad, by Jove! It's wonderful, John. Absolutely wonderful!"

New enthusiasm kindled in his eyes. He now occupied a firm position from which to attack the citadel of success. He felt that he was surrounded by the accessories necessary to and in themselves indicative of a considerable legal personality. From that table opin-

ions contrary to those of consulting attorneys could be delivered with weight. By stretching out a hand from his chair he could seize the exact volume necessary to refute their theories. The stage was set, and he had no sort of doubt but that he could admirably sustain his part. Though neither of the brothers suspected it, the barrister and the actor were very much alike in temperament. Each had a longing, not only for success, but for its symbols.

"There's one thing I wanted to speak to you about, sir. I found a lot of rubbish in one of your drawers. I've put it in this box. I suppose it may as well be thrown away."

Richard examined a curious mixture: old pipes, old letters, decrepit penholders, ineffective pencil-cases.

"Most of these can be thrown away. Ah, no," he pensively said, as he took up a lady's white glove, very dirty at the fingers, "I'll keep that."

He did not, while rescuing Gwendolen's glove, notice the clerk's inquiring glance, that belied the amused twitch of his mouth.

"And this old collar."

"You can't want that, sir!"

"Yes, it's marked 'N. C.' It belonged to Neill Cream, the murderer, the man who collected corpses of women, just as children collect postage stamps. This revolver, too, I want; and there are the cartridges that go with it. The thing was given to me by old Crowder, the coroner, a friend of my father's. It is in a filthy state. Have it cleaned up. The revolver was a perquisite of his. Some poor devil committed suicide with it. I was at Marlborough at the time, and I remember that this revolver was the first thing that made me take an interest in crime."

"But," cried Moseley in alarm, "you are not thinking of doing much at the Criminal Bar! There's no money in it, sir."

"Crime is the most interesting subject that exists. The respectable, the wealthy, the aristocratic criminal is now playing a very leading part in our lives. To make a success at the Common Law Bar a man must have a sound knowledge of the criminal side. Look at Russell, and Clarke, and Willie Mathews, and Charlie Gill. You may take it for granted that in most important civil cases one of the parties, plaintiff or defendant, petitioner or co-respondent, ought to be in the dock, and you've got to *know*."

He held out his hand, and there was emotion in his voice:

"Thank you, John, a thousand times. I think you've made me."

"I fancy we shall do fairly well, sir, in these chambers."

Thus the contract of partnership was clinched.

But the clerk, as he went out of the room, felt something of dissatisfaction at the objects which his master had seen fit to retain out of the rubbish heap.

"I wonder who the woman is," he reflected. "It wasn't an old glove, and it hadn't been cleaned. I suppose it's going on still, whatever it was."

He had noticed that nobody had been practising mathematics on the inside.

He decided to consult Jubb.

A few days afterwards he met that shambling fellow in Essex Court. Now it happened that in addition to his other great gifts, Moseley was a master of the art of when and how to stand drinks.

"Mr. Jubb," said he, "if you happen to be so disposed, will you come to the 'Devereux Arms'?"

"I was just thinking of having a 'tiddley' myself," Jubb answered, finding himself—not altogether unexpectedly—so disposed.

Persons of Bacchanalian tendencies always call alcohol by an alias.

They allude to drinking bouts by flippant nicknames. It is possible that by this practice they are convinced that they consume only temperance beverages, and are, themselves, tectotalers. In the somewhat dismal bar-parlour of the "Devereux," Moseley found that Jubb behaved as a man with a grievance.

"What do you want, a millionaire like you, to come back to business and take the bread out of other people's mouths?"

The exaggeration of his language was intended to disguise his bitterness at the loss of Meyville.

"*What* bread? How much was he making with *you*? Nothing."

"Ah, but I gave him his start. I got him that Yoghi case."

Moseley smiled at the palpable lie.

The other moodily continued, tapping the bar-counter with his glass:

"And now he's made a hit! In a year or so he'll be the fashion. The papers are full of him now—pictures and what not—and Society gossip. I tell you he's being boomed like a hair-restorer or a music-hall singer. He's as bad as—well, we won't mention no names. We don't need to, Mr. Moseley, both of us being in the know."

"How's he being boomed? Who's doing it? No such thing."

"Now, look here, Mr. Moseley, what is there in this Yoghi case to make all this fuss about? Anybody could have done what he did. Of course, the case was so disgusting that it hit the public taste. But it's not the case nor yet the Yoghi that people talk about. It's him—Mr. Richard Meyville here, Mr. Richard Meyville there. Photo of ditto in wig and gown; ditto in a fancy vest. Lord, it makes me sick, all this Barnum business. Yes, I will have another special Scotch, and soda to match. Yours a small soda! You never was a sportsman."

There are people who regard the consumption of drink as a branch of sport. They also look upon the loss of money by the backing of their unfounded 'fancies' in the same light.

"All that doesn't show who's doing the booming," said Moseley. "I shouldn't go about talking such nonsense if I were you. I shouldn't indeed."

"Oh, you'd suffer in silence if you was me, would you? You'd let somebody come and take away the man you've made; mind you, made, and set him up in fine style! And fill the papers with his pictures, just as though he was Seymour Hicks, and say nothing about it! Well, I'm human, and I don't mind confessing it in this very bar-parlour. Meyville was my ewe-lamb, as the saying is, and that infernal trollop took him away."

"Who are you calling a trollop now, Mr. Jubb?"

"Well, we needn't mention names, you not being in the know."

"It's all moonshine. He is not that sort. This is all spite."

"Oh, is it? Doesn't she drive up in her carriage and pair? Isn't she ringing up on the telephone—'2835 Mayfair'—all day, till I'm sick of it?"

"Oh, that's her number?—'2835 Mayfair'!" Moseley triumphantly said. "We'll see all about this trollop and no mistake. And what's more, I don't like your tone, Mr. Jubb, and my governor won't like it either. And your governor won't be too well pleased when he hears the full facts, which he will do—if you go about scandal-mongering any more, and don't you forget it."

Moseley loomed large over the miserable little man.

"Oh, don't be too hard on a fellow when he's down."

"So you're down, are you? Well, mopping whisky all day, and telling lies about 'ewe-lambs' won't get you up in the world, so don't think it."

"I'm not as young as I was, Mr. Moseley," pleaded the other hopelessly.

"Oh, now it's your lost youth and beauty is it? What's the truth about 2835 Mayfair? Who is she?"

Jubb seemed on the point of shedding tears of alcohol as he blurted out:

"She's Mrs. Ainslie—and lives in Green Street—and she called me—a caretaker—and I ought to have answered something bitter and sarcastic. But she was so beautiful that you'll hardly believe it—the words didn't somehow come."

"What's she like?"

"You know the sort, all hats and veils and things that jingle—more like a respondent than anything else, I should say—or, perhaps, an intervener—now I come to think of it—I should say, Mr. Moseley, judging by appearances—not that one should rightly judge by appearances, that she's married."

"What makes you think she's married?"

"Well, she's *Mrs.*, ain't she?"

"Oh, that's nothing nowadays, Mr. Jubb."

"I saw her wedding-ring when she took her glove off."

"Why did she do that?"

"She threw the glove in the waste-paper basket."

Here, indeed, was light. John pursued the subject: "What for?"

"She happened to touch something in the chambers, and it happened to be dirty."

"Yes, you saw to that. Trust you for dirt. But she may be a widow."

An alliance with a wealthy widow would have met with John's complete and entire approval.

"I looked her up in the *Court Guide*. And there is a Mr. Ainslie. To be sure, our *Court Guide* is three years old. A great deal can happen in three years. We are here to-day, Mr. Moseley, and gone to-morrow," he sadly said.

"Oh, don't you worry about that. You'll be in the Devereux Arms till it falls down. Do you know any more?"

"No, I only saw her once. But I've heard a deal of talk on the telephone—soft talk, as one might say. Still, it's my belief that she's more in love with him than he with her. But that don't need to make any difference. It was the same with me and my missus."

"Never mind about that," said Moseley, who had caught a nod from Durham's ultra-shrewd and overdressed clerk. "You get back to Chambers, and if there are any briefs come in for us this afternoon, mind you send them on."

"How many more do you want? Three came in this morning. It's awful to see the work go away—all from first-class solicitors—Godfrey's and such like. It's taking the bread out of my mouth, Mr. Moseley, it is indeed."

The notice of Richard's removal had not yet been

put up at 10 Essex Court, and the unfortunate Jubb opened the door to brief-bearing clerks, and from the window mournfully watched them across the court to No. 14.

When he had shambled out, Durham's clerk approached Moseley.

"I was on my way to your place. I've got rather a good thing for your governor."

"We're not laying ourselves out for criminal work. Our line is Common Law and Parliamentary."

"Oh, we *do* consent to go into Court if we're pressed? Do we draw the line at a *cause célèbre*?"

"What is it?"

"Lord Islington."

"Nonsense; he fled the country, and you know as well as I do that the Treasury has decided not to prosecute peers or dignitaries of the Church for that sort of thing. He was given the 'office' and cleared out in time. And no wonder. According to all accounts, he was right, because his was a devilish bad case."

Durham's clerk acceded:

"It *was*."

The accentuation could not be accidental.

Immediately Moseley understood. In a low voice he asked:

"All the witnesses out of the country?"

"For the last week we've been doing a big export business. Islington will have to pay my boss 2,000 guineas for—well, holiday trips for these coves."

His hands suggested the infinite. Then he added:

"We've always acted for the brute in his little troubles. And we've done this pretty neatly. The case for the prosecution is—well, it's in different parts of

different continents. Now before the Treasury get wind of this and withdraw the warrant, Islington surrenders. He says, 'What have you against me? Let us hear all about it. I have been abroad for my health. Directly I am well enough, you see me here. Do your worst.' The Treasury will be able to do nothing. But Islington's case was so notorious that they had to pretend to do *something*."

Moseley's face expressed no surprise or other emotion.

The solicitor's clerk persisted:

"Will your governor be at the police-court, Marlborough Street, to-morrow at eleven?"

"How much?"

"Five guineas."

"This is my busy day. When I want real humour I go to a music-hall."

"Five guineas for five minutes! It'll be a smash up, I tell you. How much will you do it for?"

"Fifty."

"*You're* the funny man now."

"I tell you we don't want to do it at all. We're not going to specialise in this sort of work."

"The Yoghi wasn't altogether a dream of fair women, was it?"

"I tell you we don't want this sort of thing. We can pick and choose."

"Oh, I suppose you want to be standing Counsel to a Kindergarten."

"There's a lot of difference between a Kindergarten—and Islington."

The other laughed. "I'll give you fifty," he said.

Moseley had asked a prohibitive, a preposterous price. He did not want Richard to do the work. On

the other hand, Lord Islington, a Jew of immense wealth, knowing that he was about to reëstablish his good name, and appreciating the vast amount of interest centred in Richard, had wired from Paris to have him retained. He wished to rehabilitate himself with as much publicity as possible. To be represented by Durham, whose reputation for crafty walking in devious ways was almost unique, would have been ill-advised.

"All right. Come round and see the governor. He'll give you five minutes."

"Will he? Do I enter on my knees and sing a simple hymn of praise? Please put me up to any tips."

John did not reply to the sarcasm. He was wondering what effect Mrs. Ainslie would have on the partnership.

CHAPTER XV

THE MUNIFICENCE OF MONTAGUE

THREE days after Ethel's presentation, Richard and Billy were seated in the dining-room at Gloucester Terrace. The conditions under which they dined were infinitely less unfavourable than those that characterised the previous entertainment. For Lady Meyville and Ethel the excitement of the Drawing-room had proved a delight. It was clear that Billy was really in love. True, his love was boisterous and blatant, but obviously he was devoted to Ethel. Out of business-hours he was always with her, at dinners, theatres, dances. Saturdays and Sundays were spent at Raningham, of which he was a member, or on the river. In the duties of a *fiancé* no one could have been more efficient than he.

Also, Richard had modified his attitude on those few occasions when he met Billy. He himself having secured another unpopular success in the affair of Lord Islington, had considerably increased his popularity with clients. After the whirling life of the Law Courts, he spent most of his evenings with Gwendolen. At all "first nights" they were together. Gwendolen received invitations to dine, "with poor Mr. Ainslie, if he is well enough—if not, *do* come yourself. We are asking Mr. Meyville." Their "friendship" was "accepted," except by those unfortunate persons whose "friendships" were "misinterpreted." For this comfortable state of things, their own personal popularity, their good looks and high spirits, were, in the main, respon-

sible. Still, no doubt Mr. Ainslie's Monologues on Maladies had also procured much sympathy for the happy couple. Also, Lashbridge and Pamela were very kind. The four were frequently seen dining at the Ritz, and afterwards at a theatre.

An indiscreet paragraph in *The Morning Star*, to the effect that "Last night Lord Lashbridge was entertaining Mr. and Mrs. Richard Meyville at Prince's Restaurant," really expressed the accepted view of the situation. There was an agreeable touch of prophecy about it. The duty of the Society chronicler is to be in advance of the amateur scandalmonger. For Richard the experience of the last few weeks had been delightful. He enjoyed to the full the wonderful pleasure that comes to him who wears the laurels of Fame in his youth. No longer did new friends, intelligently scrutinising his shorn face, hazard the question, "You are at the Bar, I suppose?" The mention of his name was always received with a quickening look of interest. Young, handsome, beloved to the utmost of his desire, all was well with Richard.

As he sat at the table in the fulness of postprandial satisfaction, he took a not unkindly interest in William Brinstable. A new cook, a non-adherent to the Hydraulic School of British Cookery, had been installed in Gloucester Terrace. Admirable port, of Richard's selection, was upon the table. They were both smoking Cortina Mora cigars. The "after-dinner feeling" was upon them. Strange types, strangely united, these future brothers-in-law. Each presented a perfect picture of contentment, completely satisfied in mind and body. Richard, sleek, alert, with that touch of the ascetic necessary to the complete enjoyment of each faculty, eager and keen as an undrawn sword; Billy,

bulbous from the good things of the past, puffing out smoke at the altar of the Future.

His very appearance was reassuring, and Richard, overwhelmed by the optimism of prosperity, sought to brush from his mind all misgivings as to his stout companion.

"Another glass of wine—Billy."

It was the first time that he had used the diminutive to describe his portly guest.

"Right oh! Good wine needs no bush. But Billy needs good wine," he answered with a cheeriness so genuine that it was not actually unpleasant.

"Dick, old boy, I've taken that house in Tilney Street," he said, pouring out the port; "it's small, but it's smart—devilish smart. One minute from Stanhope Gate. The neatest little crib in all Mayfair."

And he lay back with satisfaction, giving full play to his adiposity.

Richard regarded his stoutness attentively. It mystified him. The development was not comic. It was not actually coarse. Under what classification, other than that of unnecessary things, did it come? He tried to compel himself to admit that it stood for respectability. This pre-middle-aged corpulence, he thought, might perhaps be the trade-mark of stability. No man of forty who had a care in the world could carry his fat with such complete complacency.

"I was in two minds about taking the house yesterday, because of the premium," he said; "but Ethel was all for it; she loves it; and, bless her, she deserves all that Billy can provide, and you may tell her I said so. But, damn it, when I looked up the fashionable intelligence in *The Morning Post*, and saw that on the 29th of this month she is to be Mrs. Bill, I drove down to the

agent's and took the house. But I got 'em to cut the premium down one-third, as a wedding present to little Bill, on whom you may note there are no flies—not a fly per acre.”

“Pretty expensive to keep up?”

“What does it matter? Business is booming. We've got hold of a lot of new things, amongst others two gilt-edged prospectuses, things as safe as Trust Funds. No dividends of one, decimal 34726 for Venables, Hampton and Brinstable. Don't think it. Funny this. I don't wish to boast. I'm blunt, but I bar bombast. Still, I can't help feeling that I've brought good luck all round. Where were you before I met you? God knows. Now you can take silk next year, if you like. I'm not flattering you, Dick, old boy, but your rise has been miraculous. Montie, after a shoal of failures, has got a winner. And Ethel—well, she's got *me*.”

Laughing heartily, he clapped his hand on Richard's shoulder with such violence as to amount almost to assault and battery. When Richard had recovered, the hearty man continued:

“I don't want to be egotistical about being a mascot, but Billy has the best luck of any of you. He's got the best girl in this rotund orb to wife—as the saying is. She's got to be treated like a princess—only more so. She's got to have everything she wants. And, further, she's got to want everything Billy can get. Directly she said she cared for me—— Do I bore you? People hate being told home-truths about their sisters. Directly she said she cared for me, I began to look round. And I said to myself, 'Billy, my boy, she's done you a devilish good turn. You're ugly and—it must be admitted—you are perhaps a little—vulgar.' That's what I said.”

Richard negatived the suggestion, but Billy was firm.

"*I am vulgar*," he said. "I'm fat. I'm red. Damn it, I'm devilish vulgar—so devilish vulgar that I ought to be devilish rich. That's the only thing that you can do with a shape like mine. Make it symbolic. Until I met Ethel, I was content with catering for Billy in a small way. But—directly I found she was in love with me, I saw I was out of the picture. We don't match. She's—well, she's a pearl o' price. And I—well, in appearance I'm a bit porcine. So I bestirred myself. I looked round. I took thought for the morrow. The business was in my hands. And I've worked wonders. Everything is going deuced well and will go better. And I've got to thank Ethel for it, from A to Z and back again. She's made Billy what he is, and what he will be, God bless her."

The quaint, confidential jargon, the amorous, semi-alcoholic excitement and the self-appreciating egotism of the man were not without their fascination for Richard. Billy was a personality; and to a personality much may be forgiven. Also, a personality is generally successful. Originally Richard had regarded him as a monstrous burlesque. But Billy stood out firm, clear, and distinct—a comprehensive character. Two facts, though overlooked by him, had contributed to this result. They were subjective and objective. Richard was a huge success. Billy was devotedly attached to Ethel.

At this moment, the door opened, and Lady Meyville, followed by Ethel, came into the room. In her hand was an opened telegram.

"Oh, this is too bad, Richard. We must postpone the wedding."

"What!" shouted Billy, magenta with emotion, "who has the infernal——"

"This is from Montague——"

"He dares!" Richard read out the telegram. "Have *matinée* on Wednesday, 29th. Surprised you did not consult me.—MONTAGUE."

Richard turned livid.

Billy subsided into his chair, heaving with fat merri-ment.

"This beats all," he groaned, as the laughter sank into ripples of mirth, "there will never be such impudence again on God's fair earth. The thing ought to be published—if only there was a comic paper in this country."

"I don't know what you're laughing at, William. You see, he has signed the telegram 'Montague' instead of 'Montie.' He must be very much annoyed."

Lady Meyville's sense of the ridiculous had never been stirred by any action of her eldest son's.

Ethel, on whose face there was no trace of anxiety or sorrow, charming in a dinner dress of turquoise-blue, came to the rescue with a rashness not altogether devoid of grim humour.

"I think we should fix the wedding for the day after Montie is knighted."

Puzzled, Lady Meyville sought a defence:

"Montie will lose a lot of money if the *matinée* is postponed."

"My dear mother, we can't ask him to do that," said Richard, gravely; "we shall lose money, too, if the wedding is postponed."

"The invitations have been sent out. How much are wedding-cards a dozen?" asked Ethel, sarcastically.

"We must find out, old girl," Billy answered, "and

he can deduct the out-of-pocket expenses from his wedding present."

But Richard could not control his indignation to the extent of commenting upon the matter.

"Do you think he means it as a joke?" inquired Billy, seeking vainly for a solution.

"No, he doesn't. He never means anything as a joke. He *is* a joke. He is the worst sort—the unconscious brand."

The other announced:

"This man ought to be kicked."

Richard entirely agreed with him.

Incipient Anti-Montaguism formed a bond of sympathy between the two.

Richard went to his mother's writing-desk, took out a telegraph form, and wrote:

"Do not postpone *matinée* on any account. I have no wish to see the piece again.—ETHEL."

The telegram did not find favour in Lady Meyville's eyes, but the others were amused. The message was despatched.

Under these circumstances it was that Richard called upon his brother in Park Place, early on the following morning. He found the actor in bed.

"Confound it; don't pull up the blind," was his greeting.

Montague turned on the electric light, shaded by daintily becoming pink silk. Immediately Richard found himself in a sort of National Portrait Gallery of Contemporary Female Beauty.

Panels, cabinets, miniatures were there in rich profusion. But in the faint light he recognised the artists more easily than the sitters. On sumptuous staircases were the works of Lafayette; Alfred Ellis dealt chiefly

with ladies who were looking over their shoulders to avoid contiguous palm-trees; while Alice Hughes photographed only ladies interested in horticulture, flower-bearing, as though advertising the produce of some seedsman, and Lallie Charles photographed women as they believed themselves to be.

But, in spite of the pink glow, he was surprised at the hard lines that were graven on his brother's face. The continual application of "make-up" had exaggerated his features and made him look like a walnut; with his grey hair dishevelled as he lay in bed he seemed only a crude scenario of "Charles Stuart."

In the effeminate luxury of his silken surroundings he suggested a decrepit dowager rather than anything masculine.

"I'm so sorry you won't be able to give Ethel away," he began casually, "but, after all, business is business. And I suppose Art is Art."

Not yet completely in possession of his full faculties, the other stroked his forehead:

"Oh, yes, I got a silly telegram from her. What does it mean?"

"What do you think it means? It means that she doesn't want her marriage to stand in the way of your *matinée*. That's sisterly, isn't it?"

"That's nonsense. I must be present at my sister's wedding! Who else could give her away?"

"Oh, I could do that—at a pinch."

In surprise at such a proposal, Montague sat up in bed, revealing extremely beautiful tartan silk pyjamas.

"I'm the elder brother—it's my duty."

He had looked forward to acquiring considerable publicity from the marriage of his pretty sister.

Already he had imagined himself—in a brown frock-coat, trimmed, possibly, with black braid—walking up the aisle by her side. He had decided to make the marriage a great social and artistic function! And this was his reward! He wasn't wanted! They could get on without him, without Montague Cliftonville. It seemed incredible. Yet so it was.

In spite of the affront he behaved nobly.

"I shall postpone the *matinée*," he said, as though taking a decision of European importance. "But I should have been consulted."

Without one word of the expected gratitude, Richard asked coldly:

"What are you giving her for a wedding present?"

"Well, I've been thinking of that a good deal. You see, although you are getting on very well, you can't have much money in hand. Now, if I were to give her a tiara, or anything like that, my present would dwarf yours. Now I naturally don't want to do that. You see—between ourselves—I'm only an actor, whilst you are a member of a recognized profession. It wouldn't be in good taste for me to do anything showy."

"Well, I'm only giving her two hundred pounds to buy anything she likes with."

"What!"

"I know it's very little. But it's the best I can do. And don't let me stand in the way of your generosity. I shan't mind if you give her a tiara, and I'm sure she'd like it."

Montague groaned.

"I think the best thing I can do is to give her a cheque."

"For how much?"

After a pause, Montague said:

"To tell you the truth, old boy, money is devilish tight. I've got such a lot of expenses."

"I know you're a pretty costly person. You never deny yourself anything."

"Except a wife," the other alertly cried. "Except a wife. If only I could afford to be married! But I can't. Look at all these women," he waved dramatically at the photographs. "I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll have a large envelope placed among the wedding presents—'Cheque from Mr. Montague Cliftonville.' That's what I'll do."

"But why a *large* envelope? Quite a big cheque can go into a small envelope."

"I know, I know. That's the trouble," he answered vaguely.

"What's the trouble?"

"I can't afford just now to draw a cheque for a large sum, and it would be absurd for me to give her a hundred or two hundred pounds. It would look mean if anybody heard about it. Later, when things are better, I'll do the handsome."

"You propose at present giving her a large empty envelope?"

"That's special pleading," answered the actor vaguely.

Montague always regarded any unpleasant statement as special pleading.

"No. I only asked you a question."

"Don't put words in my mouth." This was another favourite repartee of his.

"I'll tell you what I'll do as well."

"Besides the present of stationery? Besides the practical joke?"

"Yes, yes. I'll invite all the wedding party to the

theatre—not all, of course—but a good many—the smartest. Say two hundred. That's a present of a hundred guineas."

Alarmed at his own generosity, he shook his head:

"I doubt if my business manager will like that. I doubt it very much."

As Richard went to the door he said:

"Montague, if you had a sense of humour you'd amuse yourself very much."

"I wonder what the devil he means," the actor thought as he turned over on his side.

CHAPTER XVI

"WEDDING OF AN EMINENT ACTOR'S SISTER"

MONTAGUE took a great deal of trouble over his sister's wedding. His advertising agent was indefatigable. Indeed, that able assistant could not have given much more publicity to the affair had it been "The Chief" himself who was being married. Photographs of Ethel and Billy appeared in all the illustrated papers. Ladies' journals asked for the bride's opinions on married life. She was invited to dilate on the advantages of short engagements and long honeymoons.

On the 9th July *le tout* Bayswater flocked to the Church of St. Michael and All Sepulchres.

Montague secured the attendance of a few peers and peeresses, histrionically-minded archdeacons, smart widowettes in large hats, and the leading members of the theatrical profession.

To the strains of "The Voice that breathed o'er Eden," he, in an admirably cut grey frockcoat, led Ethel up the aisle. There were tears in Lady Meyville's eyes as she stood by Richard's side.

Afterwards, at the Bayswater Palace Hotel, Montague brought real joy to her. He behaved delightfully. So affable, indeed, was he that she ventured to introduce Mrs. Bolitho and Mrs. Pegram to him. He spoke quite kindly of Smelhurst, and said that it ought to have a theatre. He, however, became a little restive over one of Mrs. Paxton-Pryce's experiences with kitchen-maids, and, to save himself, offered to introduce

her to Mrs. Ainslie, who was talking to Richard. On the relationship being explained, he saved the situation with a compliment which was uncomplimentary to Gwendolen. He said they were so much alike that he felt sure they could not be related.

The actor was in great good humour. Things had been going well with him. Only this morning he had been informed (by one who spoke with knowledge) that it was quite probable that he would next year be invited to the Royal Enclosure at Ascot. Also, the affair of the *Phoenix* had been amicably settled. By way of compensation for the alleged affront, the editor had promised to publish a special *Montague Cliftonville Supplement*, containing pictures of the player in his "greatest creations." The agreement had been put into writing, and the paper was bound to do a thing which it had never done before. It would be a splendid advertisement, and would surely place him ahead of the other competitors for the knighthood.

"Your brother's acting very well to-day," said Gwendolen.

Richard laughed, as he saw Montie standing with an affectionate hand on Lady Meyville's waist, whilst the handsome old lady looked gratefully into his eyes. "Yes, it's a good performance, Gwen. But this sort of thing is natural to him. It isn't hypocrisy. He always fancies himself in the presence of an audience."

"Well, I don't like it. At the garden-party last year at Windsor someone said that he had kneecaps in his pocket ready to kneel down and be knighted at a moment's notice. Here he is again."

Graciously the actor held Gwen's hand.

"My dear Mrs. Ainslie, how good of you to come! How very, very good! Such a perfect dress. Ah!—

you know how to wear your clothes. So few women, even on the stage, know how to wear their clothes. Ah!—and the beautiful diamond and sapphire brooch you gave my dear little sister—quite, quite charming! Very like the one I wore in the second act of *Charles Stuart*. You may have noticed it."

Gwen looked him straight in the eyes.

"Who could help noticing *any* brooch *you* wear? You wear your brooches so wonderfully well."

He smiled:

"Flatterer! But I like people to say nice things. Nice things are the dividend that——"

He could not finish the epigram. "I've got the scenario," he explained good-humouredly, "but I can't work out the idea. When I do I'll send it you on a picture postcard. I'm having some new ones done. I think you'll like them."

"Oh, thank you, Mr. Cliftonville, so, so much."

Then confidentially, putting his hand on Richard's shoulder:

"I hope he's very good to you."

"I have no complaint to make, thank you very much, Mr. Cliftonville," she answered, with a twinkle of amusement in her eyes.

"Montague, surely. Why don't you call me Montague? You know I regard you almost as—a sister-in-law."

Then he passed away on his quasi-regal progress through the room.

"Did you tell him—about us?" she asked.

"No, of course not. One can't talk to him about anything but himself. It would give him physical pain."

"Still, he *knows*—about us."

"Naturally he knows. I don't suppose there's anybody here who knows you or me who doesn't know—about us."

There was a tender pressure on his arm as she said: "Oh, I'm so proud, so very proud."

"Of—it?"

"Of you." Radiantly she looked at him. "Oh, if this was our own wedding day!"

This was the first time she had mentioned the subject. A sparkle of delight came into his eyes.

By way of comment she queried:

"Was that at the possibility or at the idea?"

"Both," he answered.

"Oh, you dear thing! Would you really? And at my age?"

"Your age will always be the ideal age for me."

"I shall hold you to that."

"I shall compel you to. Now let's go and drink Ethel's health."

On their way her notice was attracted by a little woman, obviously Jewish, but pretty. She had auburn hair, a pronounced nose, and wore too much powder. Her grey eyes were fixed on Billy in the distance. Her firm, small mouth was tight shut. Around it were lines of pain.

"Look at that," said Gwen, "there's a tragedy in that face. She's suffering. She's interested in the bridegroom—interested in a sinister way."

"Nonsense!" laughed Richard. "The fact that a man is in the dock at Bow Street doesn't prove that he's committed his crime in the dock. The woman looks as though she suffered from indigestion."

"In some things you are quite cruel or quite stupid. I don't know which is the worse. Cruelty is often the re-

sult of stupidity. Go and ask your mother who she is."

Richard returned with the information that she was a Mrs. Wagstaffe, the wife of one of Billy's clients. Intelligence came into Gwen's eyes.

"Why, that's the woman, Mrs. Wagstaffe, who has given Mr. Brinstable a set of Hall Caine's works as a wedding present. I was astonished when I saw them. There is something behind this. That unhappy little Jewess is a woman of strong character. She has a taste for the macabre. There's a tragedy here. She's looking at him as I should look at you at your wedding—if I didn't happen to be the bride."

"And had the bad luck to be alive." He smiled.

"Dear boy," she answered, and he felt her at his side as he pushed through the crowd.

They approached the bridegroom and bride, who were standing by a long refreshment table, Billy, red and radiant, looking desperately *endimanché* in a white satin tie, dark grey frockcoat, trousers of a pronounced shepherd's plaid design, and a red carnation. Ethel, dignified and calm, conveyed rather the idea of placid well-being than of nuptial ecstasy.

"She looks very pale," was the universal verdict, capped occasionally by the comment, "Anybody would look pale beside Billy Brinstable."

And, beyond question, Billy felt the heat, and showed it. Indeed, Montague, while expressing approval of the ceremony as a whole, had stated that the bridegroom did not look the part. But then the bridegroom's part at a wedding is the leading man's part. And, of course, Montague——

Richard and Gwendolen congratulated the young couple.

Billy, beaming, mopped his brow:

"Thanks awfully. You may well say so. This day, the ninth day of July of the current year, is the proudest day in the life of William Brinstable. And William Brinstable is willing to bet on the subject with all and sundry in pounds, shillings, or pence."

Gwen repressed a shudder.

Turning, she said to Richard: "Will you ever forget that speech?"

She noticed that he bit his lip as he answered: "I doubt it."

"But, Dick, you didn't tell me that your sister was marrying a 'bounder.' There is no other word. In church I tried hard to have doubts. But now that he's spoken—oh, Dick, it's terrible. She can't—possibly—love him!"

He answered abruptly:

"He's a very good sort."

"A girl, a pretty girl, doesn't marry a man because he's a good sort. Is he rich?"

"No."

"He's a solicitor, isn't he?" she inquired, searching her mind for an explanation of so strange a union.

He looked at her sharply.

"Yes. Well?"

"Oh, nothing."

"You've got something in your head. And I know what it is; but you're wrong. Do you think that I'd allow a sister of mine to marry a man like that——" In his annoyance he was on the point of adding "in order to help me," but he pulled himself up at the slip. "A man like that."

"No, dear, of course not. But a sister of yours must surely be so fond of you that she would do anything to help you on."

Clearly he was concealing something from her, something that pained him. Hitherto he had always come to her in his troubles. He had appeared to need her sympathy in any sorrow. Could it be that of his late success had been born a feeling of independence that would make her, in some degree, less necessary to his life? She shot a questioning glance. But his eyes did not meet hers.

She drove home with a slight flutter of fear in her heart.

Montague, on his way to his chambers, noticed a contents bill of an evening paper:

WEDDING OF AN EMINENT ACTOR'S SISTER.

"They might have said 'great' instead of 'eminent,'" he reflected. "Still, one can't have everything."

Yet in his heart he didn't see why he shouldn't.

* * * * *

On the last day of the Trinity term Richard asked John to bring him his fee-book.

The clerk brought in the thin red leather volume and handed it to him, and stood by his side as he opened it.

"The year didn't begin very well, sir," he said, with a comical twitch of his mouth.

"No, it didn't. But what have we made since our arrangement?"

A smile of pleasure came into the clerk's face at the use of the plural.

"I've just totted it up, sir. It's 785 guineas. It's not as much as I expected," he added, scratching his fat chin. "But everything looks very hopeful now."

"Yes," said Richard, as he looked down the list of solicitors who had employed him, "we've got several of the big firms—for small amounts."

"They've all had a nibble, sir. What I said to the managing clerks was this: 'Come and try the governor. If you aren't pleased, you needn't come back. But if you don't *try* the governor *now*, you may not be able to get him five years hence—if I'm spared to be his clerk.' That's what I said. Some of them laughed. 'Think you've got a Rufus Isaacs, John?' they asked. And I replied, 'I don't *say* I have, and I don't *say* I haven't. But I've got the *next* best thing to it, and in two years' time——'" He broke off, rubbing his chin and twisting his mouth. "Well, sir, perhaps I did lay it on a bit too thick."

Richard laughed. "I'm sure you did. But, anyhow, they did give me a trial. That's the great thing."

"No, sir, if you'll excuse me, that isn't the great thing. The great thing is that they're *all* pleased, every one of them. And next term there will be big work coming in. Big work in the biggest sense of the word 'work', sir."

"Good. We were talking about what was the great thing. To me the great thing is whether you're pleased or not."

John thought for a minute, and then made this strange reply:

"No one, at any rate, no man—even at the Bar is perfect."

Richard was surprised at the other's lack of enthusiasm.

"We're all human, of course," he said, with an interrogative smile.

John looked at him deliberately.

"Some of us are far more human than we've any need to be."

Richard, in spite of the fact that there was no note of insolence in the tone, felt annoyed. Abruptly he said:

"I'm off to-day to the country."

"Your address, sir?"

"I'm staying with Lord Lashbridge, Lashbridge, Buckinghamshire."

"Who's chairman of so many Committees in the Lords?"

"Yes. Why?"

"Nothing, sir."

"Well, good-bye, John; a pleasant holiday to you," and he shook his hand. "Where are you going?"

"Margate, sir, as usual—Monte Margate."

As he went out into Essex Court, dirty and dingy, Richard wondered what John implied in accusing him of intense humanity.

"I wonder whether he knows—about us!"

CHAPTER XVII

IN THE HOUSEKEEPER'S ROOM

At the station his cab was met by Gwendolen's footman, who showed him to her carriage. As he approached it, her maid, a pretty blonde, *petite* and dainty, as should be the attendant of a beautiful woman, gave him a bright smile of wisdom and welcome.

Gwendolen herself was leaning out, on her face a look of anxiety. When she saw him, radiant joy beamed from her eyes.

"Oh, I was afraid you'd be late. Jump in. We're just off."

Scarcely was the train out of the station, when she pulled up her veil, took off his Homburg hat, and covered his face with kisses.

"My dear, my dear, my dear!" he protested, laughing.

"Oh, call me 'darling,' if you mean it. Call me 'darling' if you don't. A little humbug goes a long way with me." She had her hands on his shoulders, and held him at arm's length, looking into his eyes. "And I've got you to myself for a whole month. Think of it. No Wilfred. Only me and you. No law, no work, no worries. Only me and you. Me first now. I'm not talking grammar, but I'm talking sense."

"I love you, my darling," he said in a low voice, looking intently at her. Then with his left arm he

drew her towards him, pressing her closely to his side. She, reckless of her hat, let her head rest on his shoulder whilst he kissed her with long kisses on the neck.

Her eyes were closed.

He kissed the lids. Her frame was rigid.

"God!" he gasped. "We might be killed before we get to Lashbridge."

"Yes," she whispered. Her lips scarcely moved. Her eyes opened and threw at him a glance maddening in its tenderness.

The train sped on through lanes of dull, drab houses—linen hanging out to dry—children, devoid of purpose, raising shrill cries—rattle and burr and hum—the shriek of the whistle—the sun beating hot on the drawn blinds—out into the country.

Wearily leaning back in the corner of the carriage, he lighted a cigarette.

"Do you mind getting down my bag, Dick?"

He took down her travelling-bag from the rack, and she took out an enamelled-top bottle of eau de Cologne.

"My lips are cold," she said.

"Are they?"

"Am I looking all right?"

"I never know whether a woman's hat is all right or not. The more wrong it looks, the more right it is supposed to be."

"Give me the mirror."

As he handed to her a circular mirror of silver on which was enamelled Rossetti's Beata Beatrix, he was struck by the beauty of the workmanship.

Though a man of slight artistic culture, he took an instinctive delight in the beautiful. Good things gave

him pleasure; bad things did not cause him pain. Such a temperament is ideal in an Englishman who lives in London in the twentieth century.

"You like it? But you haven't seen the most beautiful thing about it yet," she said as she arranged her veil. Then she pressed a bulb in the enamel, and the back flew open, revealing a photograph of himself.

"My dear girl, you're mad!" he laughed.

"Yes, I am. I'm mad about you, and I'm going madder every day. What is love? Egoism *à deux*. I see myself in the glass. I see you here. The two people I worship. But I worship you most. I've got to. If I only loved you as you seem to love me, you'd think that I didn't love you at all. You're a spoilt baby."

"My dear, you can't expect me to have pictures of you concealed in my boot-trees!"

"I'm afraid that would be asking too much. But if you did I should go wild with joy. You take so much for granted. Women take nothing for granted. A symbol is not a real thing. But it's something. Now, this little mirror is a present that I've given myself, from you. I thought it out. I thought it out hard for a long time, and you gave it me as a surprise yesterday. And now I'm going to kiss you for it."

"Darling," he laughed, "I should never have dreamed of giving you a looking-glass that is half a conjuring trick and half a picture gallery."

"I know you wouldn't. That's why I have to remedy your faults. You ought to have known that I wanted this, and told me to buy it for myself."

"Why buy it for yourself?"

"Because it cost thirty pounds, and my own private genius isn't very rich—just yet. But he's going to

be—thank heaven—very soon. Your poverty, Dick, has been particularly sickening. If I hadn't loved you very enormously hugely much I should have been compelled to give you up. Here was I with any amount of money, and you couldn't afford a flat. Your horrible impecuniosity kept us apart. Do you remember the San Marino Hotel?" She laughed at the remembrance. "Oh, Dick, that was too awful. But when I wanted to take that sweet little flat in Hay Hill for you, how furious you were! For that piece of impertinence poor, innocent little Gwendolen was very nearly sent to—I think you did mention the proprietor of the great, undesirable portion of Eternity on that occasion, didn't you, Dick?"

"He *was* alluded to. But nothing came of it."

She went on. "Still, you ought to have a valet. You oughtn't to stay at a place like Lashbridge without a man. If one hasn't got somebody of one's own to run one down in the servant's hall, one can't hope to be treated with respect. If you don't pay a servant of your own to slander you, all the other servants think it's their duty to do it. They assume that you are too monstrous to dare to travel with a servant."

"Servants," he admitted, "are an extraordinary race. No one will ever understand them. A servant is the hardest person in the world to cross-examine—except, perhaps, a mining engineer."

"No one has written accurately about them in this country. There is, of course, Octave Mirbeau's *Journal d'une Femme de Chambre*. How I wish you could read French! No, 'Joseph Andrews' is not of any real value to-day. But I could write a book on servants if I *could* write, which, thank heaven, I can't. If you give up loving me, I may take to writing. Each book would

be an epitaph on a dead heart. Remember, a dead heart dies daily. It is always dying. Yes, I think I could write—not a novel—a convenient handbook on servants. I have inherited my great talent from my mother, who is—I say it, Dick, without pride—the leading housekeeper in Bayswater.”

He nodded:

“I have had long talks with her. You are giving her no undue praise. It has always been a source of amazement to me that no prisoner at the Old Bailey has ever urged in mitigation of punishment, ‘My lord, I was for some time in the service of Mrs. Paxton-Pryce.’ If the judge had the pleasure of your mother’s acquaintance the plea would have carried considerable weight.”

As the train drew up at the station, Gwen said:

“The great charm of being in love isn’t that one always talks about oneself, but that one can talk nonsense that is infinitely more interesting than sense.”

Lord Lashbridge had sent a motor to meet them, and it was with huge pleasure that Richard, his mistress by his side, drove through the oak avenue leading to the old Tudor Hall. It was the first time that he had ever stayed in a great country house; also, he felt supremely happy.

“We’re to have a month’s honeymoon,” murmured Gwen. “Ten days here, and then we go on to the Plymboroughs, in Norfolk. Lord Plymborough—since his divorce—is quite as skilful a host as Lord Lashbridge.”

“Good,” he answered, “we shall have a capital time.”

Lashbridge received them cordially in the hall.

“I’m so sorry, Gwen, that I couldn’t induce Wilfred to come. I think you really ought to meet him

oftener. He tells me that he is devoted to Mr. Meyville, but hardly ever sees him. If he could have been persuaded to come here instead of going to Marienbad, I could have fitted up a private sanatorium for him in the west wing. Your rooms, good people, are in the east wing. Dinner's at 8.30. You've just time to dress. Kindly sparkle at dinner. There are, unhappily, some dolts in our midst."

They were shown up to adjoining rooms with a door between.

In the absence of her maid, Gwen went to the door and tried the handle. To her surprise, it was locked.

"Dick, is the key on your side?"

"No."

"Lashbridge is—a careless host."

However, when Richard went down he found his host in the hall.

"Did you notice, Meyville, whether your inside door was locked?"

Richard smiled:

"I'm not a locksmith, Lord Lashbridge; I don't investigate locks."

"Well, I always have doors between rooms locked. But"—and he fumbled with mock seriousness in his pocket—"there's the key. You may find it useful—in case of fire." This was a joke—if joke, indeed, it was—which he thoroughly enjoyed and invariably played on newcomers. (Guests at Lashbridge always spoke of keys as "fire escapes.")

That evening Gwendolen and Richard were one of the topics of conversation in the housekeeper's room, a large, cold apartment, with sporting prints on the walls. It was one of Lashbridge's eccentricities that he insisted on all the servants having their meals to-

gether. He had a rooted objection to a "Pugs' Room" for the upper servants.

At one end of a long table presided Mudge, the butler, fat and pompous, intensely episcopal of demeanour, a very bishop among butlers. The eighteen upper servants, valets, masseurs, and maids of the guests were seated at supper while the under servants waited upon them. At Mudge's right hand was Leah, Mrs. Ainslie's maid.

"Anybody know anything about the actor-looking man in the pink velvet room No. 2? I don't think," said the groom of the chambers, looking round, "as he's brought a gentleman with him?"

"No. 2 pink," reflected an upper housemaid. "That's a Mr. Meyville, him as is with the woman they call 'the beautiful Mrs. Ainslie,' your lady, Mamzelle, I think."

"Yes, Miss. He is an *avocat, très distingué*," replied Leah.

"I'm not saying he's not distinguished," said Mudge judicially, "as an *avocat*, which I comprehend to mean an advocate or lawyer fellow. But I take exception to a man staying in a house, a great house, as the saying is, without bringing a gentleman with him."

"I had to put out his things," broke in Payne, Lord Lashbridge's confidential man. "And I give you my word I never saw such things! Not a decent make in the lot. Boots from Baker Street. Hosier anomalous. So I looked in the breast pocket of a blue serge. What do you think I found? Tibbles and Carter, 308 Strand—Stock."

He paused in horror.

"You don't say so, Mr. Payne!" exclaimed the butler, with eyes wide open in astonishment. "Ready-made!"

"True bill, Mr. Mudge. Reach-me-downs!"

Mr. Mudge was pained and grieved. He visited his emotions on an attendant footman.

"Less noise with them plates, Joseph. Remember, you're not in the dining-room. We know what waiting is. Don't we, Mamzelle? I didn't quite catch your name?"

"Duboc, Monsieur."

"And quite a sensible-shaped name—for a French name," he said kindly. "Now, what about your Mrs. Ainslie? I suppose, judging by the proximity of the apartments, she is the lawyer's lot!"

"*Elle adore ce Monsieur.*"

"And the husband? Mr. Ainslie?"

"*Il n'existe pas. C'est un mari pour rire.*"

The gestures accompanying her words made them intelligible to Mr. Mudge.

"Well, I shouldn't be too sure. I've known cases of worms turning, and turning, bless my heart, into serpents, fangs and all. There was Lord Plymborough's divorce case. I was rather a prominent witness in Lord Plymborough's case. I was butler to the petitioner, a stockbroker, but well conducted. Here, Joseph, go up to my room and fetch my Press-cutting book."

In the absence of Joseph the assembly listened with awe to Mr. Mudge's account of his connection with that celebrated case, and complimented him on his performance.

When the book appeared he explained its existence:

"I had just stepped out of the witness box for the court to adjourn for my re-examination when a man comes up to me. 'Mr. Mudge,' he said, 'if I may

take the liberty, I represent a Press-cutting agency, and after the sensational evidence you've given to-day there'll be lots about you in the papers. Several artists have been drawing your picture. You might like to have the articles and the pictures as a memento of the occasion. A guinea for a hundred and twenty-five.' So I gave him the money, and there you are," he added proudly; "eighty-six bits and pictures all about me! That pink one is a joke out of the *Pink 'Un* itself. Devilish hot stuff it is. Whenever I take it up for a read, I always laugh, even now, I do assure you."

"Sans doute ça doit être très spirituel, mais malheureusement je ne comprends pas. C'est un calembour, sans doute."

"No, no. Calembourg is a cheese. This is a joke—thing to laugh at. Comprenez?"

"C'est extraordinaire. Pas banal, ça."

"It is extraordinary. You've hit it, and a Press-cutting agency is extraordinary. There was a man called Mudge run in for robbery with violence some years ago. And blessed if they didn't send me the bit about *him*. I wrote and told them I didn't want to know all about *all* Mudges. I was the only Mudge I wanted to hear about."

"But they owe you a lot of cuttings still," said Pinker, Lady Violet Goring's maid. Lady Violet had literary tastes, and Pinker thoroughly understood the Press-cutting system.

"Perhaps," Hodson, Lord Croxpath's man suggested, "they will remember you at your next divorce."

Very solemnly Mr. Mudge replied:

"I sincerely trust there won't be no next divorce for me. It gives a butler a bad name to figure too much before the public. I very nearly missed getting this

billet owing to Lashbridge remembering the affair, and, mind you, it ain't easy to forget, part of it having been heard *en camarade*, as the French say, don't they, Mamzelle?"

"*Mais oui, Monsieur. Certainement. On dit toujours ça.*"

"I don't care whether you're butlers, or footmen, or steward's-room boys, or ladies' attendants, you keep clear of the divorce court," he continued warningly. "It never did anyone in our profession any good. If you don't believe me, ask my friend Mr. Younghusband. He was butler to Plymborough. And after the case he couldn't get a place to suit him—not town and country. Poor old fellow, he had to take service with a parvenu who didn't run to a country establishment."

"*Comment donc!*" exclaimed Leah, "Mistaire Younghusband, *un grand maigre!* A tall, thin—but *distingué?*"

"That's him. That's Henry. The judge, I remember, was very rude about Henry. His lordship happened to dine with us once. I saw to it that he had a pretty poor dinner! Lor', I got a special bottle of tenants' dance champagne out of the cellar with my own hands for his lordship. So you know Mr. Younghusband, do you, Mamzelle?"

"Why, he is at our 'ouse. *Il est maître d'hôtel chez nous.*"

"Well, I hope the family gives him satisfaction."

"*Comme ci, comme ça. Monsieur est assez difficile.*"

"He knows about the lawyer fellow and your lady?"

"*Assurément.*"

"He would do. There's nothing Henry don't notice."

Then Leah asked Mr. Mudge as to the working of an eccentric notice in the bedrooms:

"Lord Lashbridge requests that his guests will not assist him in the payment of his servants' wages."

Surprise and horror spread over that great man's face.

"Mamzelle," he replied, "being a foreigner—no offence to her, but rather sympathy—may not understand us. The gentlemen who stay in this house are gentlemen who knows how to behave themselves as such. They know that his lordship's notice is a humorous pleasantry, and as such they treat it."

"Hear, hear!" from all sides.

"And though," continued the butler, "his lordship has particularly desired me to bring to his personal notice any abnegation of his instructions to his friends, only once have I found occasion for so doing."

"Tell us," was the general demand.

"There was a person staying here of the name of Colquhoun. His lordship didn't know him. He came, I think, with Lady Ellerston, who afterwards went bankrupt—no class, though she had manners—in a way. I thought there was something wrong about this Colquhoun as soon as I set eyes on him. He was too affable and chatty with me. Well, after staying a week—a week, mind you—he gave *me*—what do you think——"

Someone hazarded:

"A quid?"

"Ten—bob."

"Shame! The bounder!"

"Well, I brought the matter to his lordship's notice. He was rightly annoyed, and a few days afterwards he told me privately that the Colquhoun was a Sheeny stockbroker of the real name of Cohen. We were very

indignant, and we've never had Lady Ellerston to the house since."

General sympathy was expressed for Mr. Mudge.

"By the bye, Mr. Mudge," inquired Lord Croxpeth's man, "who is Lashbridge with now? Last time I was here it was with Lady Mary Kirkham, Darlington's daughter."

"Oh, that's all over. We soon got tired of her. Not enough go for us. You'll pardon me, Mr. Hodson," the butler said sternly, "*Lord Lashbridge to you. Lashbridge to me*, because he's *my* man. I should be lacking in respect to you personally if I spoke direct to you of *Croxpeth* without the prefixture."

"Beg pardon, Mr. Mudge, it shall not occur again. A mere slip of the tongue," replied the humbled valet.

"Granted, Mr. Hodson. Etiquette is one thing, forgetfulness another. In reply to your query as to what Lashbridge is up to just now, I can't say," he continued, leaning back and placing his fingers in the armholes of his waistcoat. "We were very busy in the season. We put in a deal of good work. His lordship was quite at his best."

"I can tell you," came a voice from the other end of the table.

All eyes were turned on the head chauffeur.

"Mrs. Ainslie lives in Green Street. Three times a week regular I stay outside the house over an hour. Why, bless me, I know the door by heart! Forty-eight bars in the area railings. Mrs. Ainslie's the latest. And I don't blame him. She's about the only really beautiful society woman I ever saw. If I had my way, I'd scrub 'em."

"Impossible!" exclaimed Leah indignantly. "*C'est ridicule!*"

"What say?" asked the chauffeur, leaning forward.

"This lady is Mrs. Ainslie's maid," Mr. Mudge explained. "She ought to know it. She ain't kidding."

"Catch a Frenchie not giving away her lady if she has the chance!" commented an English maid.

Volubly Leah defended her mistress.

"Elle adore Monsieur Meyville, jusqu'aux bouts des ongles. Elle lui est absolument fidèle. Pour moi, il le mérite. C'est un homme sérieux, un garçon charmant comme il n'y a pas beaucoup."

Mr. Mudge caught the drift:

"She's a good sort, and she'll stick to Mr. Meyville?"

"A good sort! *mais* yes. I was a Paquinette—a girl at Paquin's. She took me from zere. She is *adorable, et moi, je l'adore.*"

"All the same, if Lashbridge is serious, that lawyer chap won't have a chance," was Mudge's view. "The port, Joseph."

"Yes, sir."

The first footman had evidence to offer:

"If the one—the governor's special—is present at the table, I never make a mistake. There's always a peculiar look in his lordship's eye when he looks at her. It was there to-night, Mr. Mudge. Mrs. Ainslie sat two off him. And now and then he looked at her with that photographic look he has. It's a dead cert."

Mr. Mudge poured out the port.

"You will join me in a glass, Mamzelle. Here's to his lordship's good luck!"

"Je vous remercie, Monsieur," Leah answered, stiffly nodding a negative.

"Anybody say a game of bridge?" asked Mr. Mudge.

CHAPTER XVIII

LASHBRIDGE SEES HIS WAY

"How long has Lashbridge called you Gwen?"

She raised her lids. A tired smile played over her face as she looked sideways at him.

"Darling." She caressed Richard with her eyes.

He repeated the question.

"About three weeks. Jealous?"

"What do you call him?"

"Haven't you noticed? I call him 'Lord Lashbridge,' or, when I'm in a hurry, 'Lash,' like everybody else. Don't you like it?"

"I'm not keen on it."

"Thank you."

"Why?"

"It's almost a sign of jealousy."

She gave a long sigh of complete physical content.

"You're very strong, dear. I'm very tired."

"The journey was fatiguing?"

She smiled. "You're very fatiguing."

"I bore you?"

"To death," she laughed. Then, suddenly, "What's the time?"

He fumbled under the pillow for his watch.

"A quarter-past eight."

"I must be going, Dick. I ordered tea at half-past."

At dinner that day Richard, feeling sure of his ground, occasionally held the table. He, however, did not commit the error so common in pushing barristers of telling anecdotes illustrative of their forensic acumen.

Pamela, on his left, plied him with questions as to the minutest details of Montague's life, and he, loyally, drew a beautiful picture of the eminent man. Eventually he brought a gleam of light into her eyes by promising that she should meet his brother at luncheon.

Mr. Mudge, who presided over all, caught sight of the gleam, and in his mind foresaw the possibility of a woeful *mésalliance* for Lady Pamela.

Of Gwendolen that night Richard was prouder than usual. Obviously she was the prettiest woman present, and when she spoke, loud laughter followed. Then she threw a glance at him in quest of approval and of regret that he hadn't heard the jest.

They were talking of personal popularity and the difficulty of defining its cause. She had maintained that the secret of popularity lay in an unlimited ability to listen.

"In order to be really popular," said Lord Crox-peth, "a man should be a failure in life. A man who is successful never has time to devote to his friends. He is always taking thought for the day after tomorrow; whereas I, for one, shouldn't hesitate to bore a failure to death. Have we any failures here tonight?" Croxpeth was a wisp of a man, remarkable chiefly for his frankly odd clothes. Each article, from his hat to his boots, he designed himself. And, strangely enough, the whole effect was distinguished, without any suggestion of caricature. "No, we have no failures here, except," and he bowed, "except our host. But he is such an eminent failure that he may be regarded almost as a success."

Lashbridge, amused, answered:

"Thank you, Crox, for your kindly appreciation. On the whole, I'm not miserable."

He threw the "photographic" glance, mentioned by the first footman, at Gwendolen. Mr. Mudge noted it in its flight.

"No," he continued, "one is rather handicapped if one happens to be a peer. 'After all, what is the distinction of winning the Derby?'"

"Someone has *got* to win the Derby," said Gwen.

"Precisely; the institution was created for that purpose. And as for politics—well, it would never give me any real pleasure to tell a mass meeting of complete strangers that I had definitely decided to plough a lonely furrow and then rush off to Newmarket and wire to the *Times* that I couldn't get a plough to suit me. These are the politics of a peer."

"People," said Richard, "seem to forget that for politics it is necessary to have a policy."

"For success in politics, Meyville," answered his host, "one must look serious and be dull. It is no good to be really serious and merely to pretend to be dull. The dullness, at any rate, must be genuine. But to be popular mustn't one be—perhaps a little vulgar?"

The dinner-table was firmly against him.

"If," said Gwen, "you behave as though you were popular, you *will* be popular. If Lord Lashbridge behaved as though he thought we should find him tedious, we should all be bored to death."

"In my country," explained Mrs. Cyrus B. Lough, this time apparently in a breast-plate of rubies, "the only way for a man to be popular is for him to have a pile of money and let his wife spend it. In the States it's unmanly for a man to spend money on himself."

"You've made some change since the time of the *Mayflower*, Mrs. Lough," said Pamela.

"Change! I should think so, indeed! Don't talk to me about the crew of the *Mayflower*! What were they? Merely a handful of carpenters and joiners, anyway."

Lashbridge became reminiscent:

"I remember a man who acquired intense popularity, and eventually took office under Lord Salisbury in rather a curious way. He used to make a point—at dinner-tables, in clubs, anywhere—whenever a date was mentioned, of saying that the speaker was wrong, no matter whether he knew anything about it or not. Supposing I said that the eminent alien immigrant, William the Conqueror, came over here in 1066, he would assure me that it was a year later or a year previous. Then he would go and look the event up in a dictionary of dates. He would bide his time. If I was wrong he would take me aside and tell me secretly of my error, and I would be grateful to him. If I was right, he would seize a pause at a dinner-table and say very loudly indeed: 'Lashbridge has the most extraordinary memory of any man I ever met. We happened to have a discussion the other day as to the date of the Norman Conquest, or the invention of Tatcho, or whatever the thing was. Lashbridge, as usual, turned out to be right. Perfectly astounding man, Lashbridge.' Naturally I felt pleased and proud. Now, no one with any intellect is ever sure of a date. So whichever way it turned out, this fellow made a new friend. That's a tip worth remembering, Meyville."

Though the tone in which the last words were spoken was kindly and the words were accompanied by a smile, Richard resented the deliberate allusion to himself. This was one of the many occasions on which Lash-

bridge treated him with annoying patronage. He seemed to wish to belittle him in Gwen's eyes. He raised his eyebrows slightly. Gwen, however, shot out:

"Mr. Meyville is not a commercial traveller."

"My dear Gwendolen," Lashbridge almost tenderly replied, in his eyes an unmistakable "photographic" glance, "every man is a commercial traveller in his own personality. He has to exhibit samples of it to as many people as possible and persuade them to take the—what's the word?—bulk at his own valuation."

The speech, coupled with the manner of its delivery, taught Richard much. It convinced him that Gwendolen had found far more favour in Lashbridge's sight than might be compatible with his own happiness.

Late that night, when some of the bridge parties had broken up, the majority of the guests were talking over their drinks.

"Hullo!" exclaimed Croxpeth, who had taken up an illustrated paper. "This is the limit. The record is broken. No one else need move in the matter."

Everyone crowded around:

"Great Scott!"

"The end of all things!"

"No one else on earth would have done it!"

"Now he'll never get his knighthood!"

At the mention of the word "knighthood," which was received with roars of laughter, Richard approached the group. To his horror he saw a photograph of Edward VII. and Montague. Beneath it was printed: "Mr. Montague Cliftonville talking to the King at Bad-Schwerin."

He paled.

"My brother," he definitely stated, "has to pursue

the same methods of advertisement that are followed by other actors."

"Your brother!"

"Yes."

In the clatter of conversation suddenly improvised to cover the awkwardness of the situation, he detected "And this chap's a gentleman!" "Knighthood, indeed!" "Rogue and vagabond!"

"Was Montague mad?" he asked himself. As a matter of fact, the actor had simply arranged with his travelling secretary to snapshot him if ever he saw him in close proximity to his Majesty. In this case the result obtained had been very agreeable to the actor. The pose conveyed that Mr. Cliftonville was giving ripe counsel on affairs of State to his Sovereign, with whose intelligence he appeared pleased.

Montague so much admired the picture that, besides sending it to all the papers, he ordered four enlargements, one for the hall of his theatre, another for his rooms, and a third for his mother. He very kindly sent the fourth to Richard, with instruction that it was "for his chambers." Evidently Montague thought it would impress clients. With what? With Montague! Richard gave it to Moseley. Moseley thought that the frame might come in useful.

At the other end of the hall Gwendolen, over-persuaded by Lashbridge, had seated herself at the piano.

"You know, Lash, you won't like it. You aren't musical."

"I don't like music," he admitted, "but I like seeing you sing."

"Shall I sing in dumb show? What shall I sing? Oh, I'm rather fond of a song that came out during the Boer War in—the *Daily Mail*—I think. Every-

thing seems to have been seen in the *Daily Mail*. Lord Croxpath asked me just now if I'd seen an extraordinary story about a man called Jonah in the *Daily Mail*. This is a sad song, but it gets brighter towards the finish."

In a shimmering black dress and many pearls—in Lalique settings—she looked more than usually beautiful. Her eyes seemed to gaze in anguish over distant seas during the first half of each stanza, and then, as the answer came back loyal and vigorous, they sparkled in triumph:

*Sentinel set by the Northern Sea,
Is our day so dark, and our Fate so fell,
That the heart of our Lady of Snows should freeze
To the Motherland, oh Sentinel?*

*"Is it all in vain
That amidst your slain
Lie the sons of the White Lady?
Since the veldt ran red
With the blood we shed,
Need ye ask this thing of me?"*

*Sentinel set by the Eastern Sea,
What is the tale that the tribesmen tell,
Of the Brahmin's love and his loyalty
To the English flag, oh Sentinel?*

*"The icy breath
Of the Lord of Death
Has breathed o'er the Eastern Sea;
But no heart was cold,
In the farthest hold,
Where the English flag flew free."*

*Sentinel set by the Southern Sea,
What of the strife that you sought to quell,
And the price in blood and chivalry?
What of the price, oh Sentinel?*

*"We have won this strife
For the Empire's life,
And the price we shall never know.
(Could ye count the cost
Had the fight been lost,
And the English flag laid low?)"*

Then the music changed. It became more sonorous, more vigorously assertive of the nation's purpose:

*Sentinel set in the Western Isle,
Where the sea-bred sons of the Saxon dwell,
Have you told the tale of your rank and file—
The tale of your dead, oh Sentinel?*

*"We have wept our dead
With a heart of lead,
We have wept with a face of stone.
But the English race
Shall yield no place,
Where the English flag has flown."*

There was silence for a moment. There were tears in the eyes of some of the women. For the singer had recalled the agonies of a dread time. There were few in that hall who were not the poorer for a life laid down in that terrible period. Gwendolen had suddenly reopened many a wound. And to many hearts came a feeling of shame that the wound had ever been allowed to close.

"Thank you, my dear Gwendolen," said Lashbridge as she rose. There was a tremor in his voice as he spoke, and he noticed tears like dewdrops in her eyes. Never had she shown any emotion in his presence. This episode revealed her in a new and extraordinarily fascinating light. It seemed to bring her personality into closer touch with him than ever before.

Then the evening broke up.

"Gwen," said Richard very tenderly. "I want you to promise me one thing. It's a selfish thing."

"It is promised."

"I don't want you to sing again in the presence of any man but me. You seem to give away something of your soul when you sing. I want you—all of you—body and soul."

"Am I not altogether yours?"

"That's why I want you all to myself."

He buried his face in her long silken hair.

"Would you like to keep your song-bird in a cage?"

Her lips curled into his.

"No, I want you to be admired, but I don't want any man to get anything for his admiration."

"Do you know that I should like to keep you in a cage—far, far away from the Law Courts, and feed you with horrid American cigarettes, and only take you out when I wanted you? But," and she compressed her mouth into a rosebud of a pout, "you would always be out, because I should always want you, always want you, always and always."

She emphasised her words by flinging her arms close round him and straining him tight to her breast, and drawing in his breath in one of those kisses that seem to exhaust the soul.

Then he said suddenly:

"I suppose you know that Lashbridge is in love with you?"

Gaily she laughed:

"Did you really think that you would find that out first?"

Sure though he was of her loyalty, he became indignant.

"Then it's true?"

"He hasn't said so. He won't. He knows. He isn't a fool. He quite understands that it wouldn't be any good. And I think he grasps the fact that if he said—anything—I should never speak to him again. It would be unpardonable in him—as he knows—about us. Oh, Lashbridge plays the game by the proper rules."

Though he could not see her face, her firmness of tone satisfied him.

"How long has this been going on?"

"I think he began to fancy he was in love one night at dinner in Green Street. You were there. He took to calling a good deal afterwards. I think he became convinced of his unfortunate condition to-night."

"Ah, it was your singing."

"Perhaps, that may have helped. I won't do it again."

"Mind you, I don't think he likes me."

"Is that altogether—under the circumstances—unnatural? Still, he's never said so."

"Of course not; not to you."

"He's always been most enthusiastic."

"As you say, he's playing the game by the proper rules. But, Gwen, he's playing for you, and he's going to play hard."

"But he's going to lose," she said.

"And, by Jove!" exclaimed Richard from his heart, "what a terrible loss, to love and lose you, my darling!"

Gwendolen was fairly accurate in her opinion of Lashbridge. An expert in women, he had, at their first meeting, grasped the fairly obvious objective fact that she was an intensely desirable woman. Subsequently, he realised that she was a woman he could passionately love. The sight of Wilfred convinced him that, beyond question, she must have a lover. On ascertaining that her lover was an impecunious barrister, and brother of the incredible Cliftonville, he felt assured of success. She was so clearly a woman who demanded, physically and mentally, the companionship of an artist in affection. And a young barrister would either be a foolish, rattling fellow, or a lean, yellow stick with a parchment soul. At the idea of such a *liaison*, his opinion of Gwendolen had sunk in a degree. A woman's valuation of herself can be as surely estimated by her choice of a lover as a man's in his selection of a wife.

But when he saw Richard his views changed. Richard did her credit. He need not be ashamed of such a predecessor. He was a fine fellow—but he was not Lord Lashbridge.

On further knowledge of Gwendolen, while his passion began to develop rapidly, he understood that Richard was a rival whom it would be hard, if not impossible, to oust.

Piqued in his pride, he became desperately in love with her.

But when her every look, her every word told him that she loved another man it would be absurd for him to take any definite line. Yet he greatly desired her society. Her absence became intolerable. He called frequently on her, and stayed long, even when

they were not alone. He noticed that she took a tantalising pleasure in talking about Richard, his doings, his sayings, his hopes.

On one occasion he had delicately objected:

"My dear Mrs. Ainslie, I have not come here to talk about—Richard. I want to talk about you."

"It is the same thing," she answered.

Cold came to his heart:

"He's a singularly fortunate young man."

"He deserves to be."

Had she spoken thus about her husband he would have used every means to transfer her affections to himself. He would have proved himself in all things superior to her husband. A girl marries, or has a husband thrust upon her, for a hundred reasons. But when a woman, with her eyes open, deliberately selects her lover and proves to herself that she has wisely chosen, his position is well-nigh unassailable. The woman's love, self-respect, and pride are insuperable barriers against the intruder.

The unfortunate Lashbridge, finding that he had met the love of his life, and that she was beyond his reach, felt himself in a sorry case. It was obvious that she liked him, and was fond of his society. Secure in her position, she saw him a great deal. And the more he saw of her the more fiercely his hopeless passion burned.

What would be the outcome? The wretched Wilfred could not live long. He could then offer her marriage. It couldn't be supposed that she, a sensible, ambitious woman, as he knew, would prefer to be the wife of a barrister to being a Marchioness. She might not love him—but his knowledge of himself, and of his successful experiences with women, convinced him that

they would "get on," that she would—eventually love him. Still, Wilfred might live—ten years. There was a proverb about creaking doors. These reflections kept him uneasily awake, maddened at moments by the thought that the woman he loved was in his own house—possibly at that moment being kissed by one of his own guests—a most unnecessary man.

Were there no means of separating them?

The barrister was keen on his career, horribly, almost vulgarly keen. Why shouldn't Pamela take an interest in him. If it was true that his future was assured, Richard might not be an entirely impossible *mésalliance* for the girl—even with Montague Cliftonville as a brother-in-law.

Still, the scheme did not seem very promising. It did not appeal to him.

A well-arranged *liaison* is much more permanent than an ordinary marriage. It contains a hundred honeymoons. A marriage contains but one. Some last, of course, for ever; but these are few. The man and the woman who are not married meet only for pleasure, never for *ennui*. Each meeting is, in a sensual sense, an earnest of continuing love.

There must, surely, be some method of separating them—if he could find it.

Suddenly the idea came—vague and indefinite, but pregnant with promise—and in its train came sleep.

CHAPTER XIX

THE LORD CHANCELLOR AND LUNCH

AFTER a delightful long vacation, most of which had been spent in the company of Gwendolen, Richard returned to the Temple. Abundance of work awaited him. All the solicitors who had previously tested his qualities sent him more briefs—briefs of greater importance. Several solicitors, eager to profit by a discovery made at the risk of others, sent him work. Moseley's prophecies were in a fair way to come true. The clerk himself appeared satisfied. He became a little hard to please in the matter of fees. On occasions when Richard appeared single-handed he exacted the remuneration of an average "leader."

"My governor will *be* there. I guarantee it. He's as good as so-and-so or such-and-such. So you're saving the expense of a junior," he would say. Also he absolutely declined all county court cases with more or less scorn. Moseley was, indeed, a hard taskmaster. He kept his nominal employer toiling at fever-heat. His acquaintance with associates and his friendship with police magistrates' clerks enabled him to fit in an enormous amount of work. Richard's criminal practice, which he insisted on continuing, took up a great deal of time, unremuneratively, to the clerk's way of thinking.

In order to keep faithfully to his guarantee that Richard should attend to any work accepted, many considerable briefs were returned, so that the barrister could dash off from the K.B.D. to the Old Bailey for

"five and one." A pure waste of money, thought Moseley. Richard, however, fascinated by the human interest of the Central Criminal Court, was firm.

Late one afternoon, after a consultation, the clerk handed him a retainer for the promoters of the Sudbury-on-Tritham Tramways Bill—five guineas.

"Moseley, how did this come my way?" he asked in surprise.

"Well, sir, my first wife's brother is a partner in Nethershall and Milbury's, the Parliamentary agents. We haven't been exactly on speaking terms—that is to say, civil speaking terms—for some years, partly over my late wife's property, but I thought"—here he smiled—"that I should best be consulting the interests of all parties by eating humble pie. So I made a meal of it."

"And?"

"In the course of conversation—afterwards, I mentioned that you were a great friend of Lord Lashbridge's, and that if Joe Milbury had got a Bill or two in the Lords, you were just the man for any committee presided over by his lordship."

"You're very energetic, John. Unhappily, Lord Lashbridge and I are not great friends."

"But you stayed with him, sir, in the vacation! That's what gave me the idea."

"I don't think he would go out of his way one hair's breadth to do me a good turn. He would go a long way to do me a bad one."

Moseley's quick intelligence found the word "woman." His eyebrows met in a frown of irritation.

"Anyhow, sir, we've got the retainer. There will be a hundred guineas on your brief. Mr. Gregg will lead you."

"It's an excellent thing to get a footing at the Parliamentary Bar," said Richard reflectively.

"Yes, sir. It makes up for some of the time we lose at the Old Bailey."

Apart from the enormous fees earned in the committee rooms, Moseley felt that if Richard could secure any sort of practice there he would be compelled to abandon the Central Criminal Court.

The distance between it and Westminster was too great for convenience, if not for practicability. Besides, precedent was against it. He knew of no case of a man who had attempted to appear regularly before both tribunals.

"We shall see," said Richard.

"Oh, I forgot to tell you, sir, that your brother is here. Can you see him?"

"You've kept him waiting all this time!"

Not only had he kept him waiting, but, having little regard either for him or his calling, he had enjoyed doing so.

The actor appeared, ruffled in humour. His eyes instantly detected the absence of the Bad-Schwerin photograph.

Petulantly he inquired:

"What have you done with that picture of me?"

"*Ego et meus Rex?*"

"Don't be absurd."

"This is too humble a room for such a work. The National Portrait Gallery is the proper place."

"I've come here to talk sense," the mime snapped, throwing himself irritably into a chair. "A most annoying thing has happened."

He then recounted the episode of the poem in the *Phœnix*. In its development lay the cause of sorrow.

It appeared that the editor, instead of publishing instantly a supplement dealing with Montague, had already published three, each dealing with another actor. When would Montague appear? Herein lay further pain. These three other actors were, to his thinking, candidates for the honour of knighthood.

"Now when I," he wound up, "wrote to this confounded editor, a pretty stiff letter, I can tell you, he replied that he was dealing with the actors in order of merit. And I don't know whether I come even fourth or not!" Indignation shone in his eyes.

"But," answered Richard, "it is no mean thing to be the fourth greatest man in one's profession—even if he is so only in the eyes of a single man. The editor of the *Phœnix* is only a single member of the public, though, no doubt, a most important member."

"But everybody sees his paper."

"I never see it."

"All fashionable people see it."

"I understand."

"Surely," persisted Montague, "it's libellous to say that these three fellows are greater actors than myself?"

"But he doesn't say so in his paper. He only writes and tells you so."

"But the inference!"

"Is it a libel on Rufus Isaacs if a paper published a picture of Sir Edward Carson to-day, and of him to-morrow?"

"Oh, lawyers are different," Montague replied.

"No, they're not," answered Richard gravely. "It's the actors who are different. They are different from any other class of men in the world. I suppose it's the constant painting of your faces that makes you so infernally thin-skinned."

The actor thought for a second.

"That's very good," he commented reflectively. "I know a man to whom that applies—I shall say that about him." Then, returning to the subject in hand: "What had I better do?"

"Nothing. Put up better plays, old chap. And come to lunch on Sunday."

"Not in Gloucester Terrace?"

"Have no fear. The Carlton. One of Shurin's tables, right in the middle."

"Who's coming?"

"No crowned heads. Only Lady Pamela l'Estocq and Mrs. Ainslie."

"Lady Pamela l'Estocq— isn't she Lashbridge's daughter?"

"Yes."

"He's a poor weed. I can't believe he was ever really good-looking."

"The daughter admires you vastly. She's made a corner in picture postcards of you."

"Half-past-one at the Carlton will suit me admirably."

"Good."

The mention of picture postcards recalled to his mind the Bad-Schwerin photograph. As Richard didn't seem to want it, he might have let him have it back.

"Certainly. An accident has happened to the frame. But I believe the work itself is intact."

"I think of presenting it to the Playgoers' Club."

"They will, no doubt, be hugely pleased. I'm walking westwards. Are you coming?"

"My motor's waiting."

"You've got a motor?" Richard asked in surprise.

"But your theatre hasn't been doing well lately."

An uneasy look absorbed Montague's eyes, his stick, held at right angles, patted his brow.

"I get my salary."

Solemnly Richard replied:

"A solicitor with a prayer-book is always to be mistrusted. He is on his way to gaol. An actor with a motor-car generally motors to the Bankruptcy Court."

For a second, Montague seemed on the point of an explanation. He changed his mind.

"I don't like pessimists," he answered as he turned to the door; "pessimism is the consolation cup that——" But the epigram refused to come. "No, I'm not in the vein to-day—I'm not in the vein."

Wearily stroking his forehead, he went out of the room.

"Something is going wrong with Montie," reflected Richard. "Poor old chap. The motor scheme is all wrong. I wonder if he's saved any money."

Rarely had Montague enjoyed himself so much as at the lunch on Sunday. The conversation of the *parti carré* consisted of two distinct duologues. Lady Pamela sat with eyes of admiration while the actor discoursed on his favourite topic. He could not say too much about himself. Pamela, in a girl's seventh heaven, the gratification of curiosity, plied him with questions. When another actor's name was mentioned, he praised him benevolently. This one was the best actor on the stage—except, of course, in costume plays. Now this actor appeared in no others. A second actor was the most "gentlemanly" actor on the stage. It happened that the second actor had originally been an assistant in a furniture warehouse. He was even now

no more like a gentleman than an auctioneer. Several actors, he went so far as to say, would make ideal Hamlets. He was always in favour of actors playing the Prince, because he knew—from his own experience—that the public was firmly anti-Hamlet, and financial disaster invariably resulted from that play's production. The phonograph, he maintained, in moments of expansion, to non-theatrical listeners, had killed Hamlet.

Suddenly he inquired of Gwendolen:

"Who's that stout old lady who's looking at me over there? You just nodded to her."

"Oh, that's Mrs. Trout, a great American society woman."

"Do tell me, Gwen, what you think of her—what you think of her really?" asked Pamela.

Gwendolen pursed her lips: "I think she's—lady-like."

"Ladylike!" exclaimed Richard, aghast at the use of this unusable word.

A fault in the faultless amounts to a crime, just as any merit in a criminal becomes a virtue.

"When I say ladylike, I mean that she's something—just a little—like a lady."

"Good," laughed Pamela, "you've added a word to the language. It does describe her," she added, looking at the somewhat blatant American. "Oh, there's my father. He told me he'd be here. He is in very serious company, for him. That's the Chancellor, isn't it? And Sir James Tufnell. Lord Croxpath doesn't quite save the situation. A curious lunch for my father to be giving!"

"That's where you ought to be, Richard," Gwendolen said chaffingly. "You ought to be talking law

to the Lord Chancellor instead of nonsense to us."

"I am glad I know you well enough to talk nonsense to you," he said laughing; "very few people know you well enough for that. But there are several men in the Temple who devote their lives to incubating nonsense for the Lord Chancellor's ears."

"It's a mistake," interposed Montague, with the air of a deep thinker making a statement that should be remembered and handed down to one's children's children, "that they have music at lunch here, a band at a meal is a skeleton at a banquet."

Gwendolen threw light on the origin of the orchestra in English hotels.

"It was introduced to prevent us from hearing the Germans eat," she mentioned. "With them mastication is a form of music. I remember some years ago I was dining too near the band at the Savoy, and a big German, a very unsuccessful feeder, was quite indignant. 'Himmel!' he exclaimed, 'wid all zis noise I cannot hear meinsel eat!'—or he ought to have."

Strangely enough, Richard was the topic of conversation at the other table—a conversation in which Croxpath took no manner of interest.

It had come about in this way. The morality of the Bar had been discussed. Lashbridge had stated that, although barristers never seemed to make their own wills, they always seemed to be able to keep out of the divorce court—"and yet," he added, "barristers generally have such alarmingly ugly wives."

"We generally marry when we're very young," explained Tufnell; "before we have any value in the marriage market. Therefore, we do not get the pick of the bunch. Again, the barristers who don't marry young lead a rather gay life. When they've sown as

many wild oats as they decently can, they retire from agriculture and become tame husbands. Do they, Tremayne, or do they not? They're fools if they don't."

The Chancellor, thus negatively appealed to, nodded assent. White-haired, heavy, strongly built, with a very aquiline nose, clear-cut, clean-shaven features, feathery eyebrows over piercing grey eyes, he was a fine figure of a man, an ideal figure of a Chancellor, infinitely more like Thomas à Becket than Thomas à Becket ever could have been. The sternness of his countenance indicated the sternness of his morals. He had never given a man an appointment simply because the man was eminently unfitted for the post.

"Yet," pursued Lashbridge, "barristers are men. How is it, Lord Tremayne, that we never have any scandals in which they are involved? K.C.'s, for instance, never seem to get into trouble."

"It would mean death to them if they did," explained the Chancellor, whose voice was somewhat gruff, his delivery slow and ponderous. "If a King's Counsel were mixed up in any scandal, his practice would immediately cease."

"I see. Now what's the procedure? If a man wants to become a K.C. he writes to you, doesn't he?"

"That is so: and to his seniors on his circuit, notifying them of his intention."

"Well, then, if you know anything against the man's character, do you refuse to give him silk, as you call it?"

"Certainly," replied the Chancellor; "if I know anything definite, anything serious against a man's character, I should think him unworthy to be a King's Counsel. I should refuse to give him silk."

"Take a case," insisted Lashbridge, who seemed intensely interested in the matter. "Suppose that a barrister were living with another man's wife, would you give him silk?"

"I should refuse it. I do not desire to see newspaper placards headed 'K.C. in the Divorce Court.' Such a thing would bring great discredit on the profession."

"And your refusal would practically ruin him!"

"It would prevent him rising to any sort of eminence at the Bar."

Lord Tremayne's strong yellow teeth snapped with decision.

Lashbridge turned to Sir James, a note of sympathy in his voice:

"That's hard lines on our friend Meyville."

The Judge shot an angry glance in reply.

Interested, Tremayne leaned forward.

"Do you mean Richard Meyville? Is there anything of that sort against him?"

"Something very beautiful of that sort," Lashbridge answered. "She is sitting over there with him. You see four people at that table—a waiter like a Roman emperor is attending to them. That's the woman, the handsome woman with the black hair."

"But which of the men is he? I've heard a great deal about him—a brilliant young man, they tell me. But I've never seen him. Obviously, the younger one. A fine legal face," commented the Chancellor, adjusting his glasses. "By Jove, they're a handsome couple."

"And a happy couple."

"What a pity!"

"The other man," said Lashbridge, "is his brother, Cliftonville, the actor."

"I see." Again his teeth snapped.

Lashbridge, throwing a reassuring glance at Sir James, defended Richard.

"I cannot seriously believe that you would stop a man midway in his career because he loves a woman who isn't his wife. We have paid high enough prices before now owing to our belief that morality is more important than mind. In my own day England has lost three great men through this creed. She has within the last twenty years sacrificed two great politicians and one great poet on an altar which she herself does not believe to exist."

Tremayne returned definitely to the point.

"Does this woman live with her husband?"

"She lives in her husband's house."

"Then," said the Chancellor with deliberation, "the man is a common thief."

Clearly, he had not yet forgotten what was nearly a tragedy in his own career. He still remembered Vincent Skene's affair with his wife, and a sinister and tragic day at the Old Bailey.¹

"Nonsense," interposed the Judge. "I don't agree with either of you. Am I a fool or am I not? Don't think of it. Morals have nothing to do with integrity. But a man who cannot conduct his own affairs without getting into trouble is not the man to look after a client's affairs or the affairs of the nation. This young fellow has a great public future before him. You can rely on him to look after his private life."

Lashbridge gazed intently at the Judge as he spoke.

¹ See "The King's Counsel."

The Chancellor shrugged his shoulders. He seemed to have decided the case. Out of courtesy, however, he asked apparently with interest:

"Has he ever appeared before you, Jimmie?"

"Yes; he's a first-rate lawyer, an excellent speaker, and"—here was the crowning glory—"very respectful to the Bench."

"Well, I hope he'll give this woman up."

"He won't!" cried the Judge, banging his hand on the table. "Is he a damned scoundrel or is he not? I'm damned if he is."

"Will she give him up?"

"Never," said Lashbridge. "That's where she differs from an ordinary English woman. She is, in some ways, almost French. A French woman, as a rule, has one lover and sticks to him. An English woman is a collector."

"Then, Jimmie, when he sends in his application—if he does—which he must, I should say, fairly soon—I shall refuse it. And you, as you take so much interest in the young man, had better give him a hint. Then if he behaves—properly, he can apply again."

He rose.

As the men were walking through the Palm Court, Sir James grimly said to Lashbridge:

"You were indiscreet."

Lashbridge, burning, affected humility.

"I'm frightfully sorry. I had no idea how strict the rules of your Trades Union are. I had no idea that the Lord Chancellor was a great moral force. I hope I haven't done young Meyville any harm."

"I'm afraid you have—very grievous harm."

"It's a terrible thing to have done your young friend an unconscious injury."

"It is. Can there be two opinions about it? There cannot."

"Don't say a word about it to him. I must explain the matter myself."

"Possibly you will be able to do it more easily than I. No, you cannot drop me anywhere, thank you. He is getting into Mrs. Ainslie's motor while Tremayne is looking on. You've done him a most serious injury."

It was precisely with that object that Lashbridge had arranged this pleasant little lunch.

CHAPTER XX

"SHE OUGHT TO BE DEAD"

FOR half-past four on the following Thursday a consultation had been fixed in the Sudbury-on-Tritham Electric Tramways Bill at the chambers of Mr. Gregg in Parliament Street.

At a quarter to five Richard dashed up in a hansom. Snatching a huge batch of papers from his junior clerk, who was waiting, he entered the august presence of the eminent K.C.

Stout, puffy and pompous, with a face like a bull-frog, skin of an apoplectic texture, large, aggressive eyes glaring under wrinkled eyelids through glittering gold spectacles, he sat with his back to the light at the end of a long table covered with papers, massive remunerative documents. In the dismal, dirty room, furnished mainly with statutes and reports and blue-books, there was no attempt at decoration. On the dull green distempered walls hung two or three discoloured maps, the sole sacrifice to art in the place. Some maps are less interesting than others. Some are, at any rate, suggestive of blue skies and limpid air and sun-kissed palms. These maps only suggested drabness and gloom. They might have been maps of—Walthamstow Without or Ponder's End. On each side of the table were seated promoters, solicitors, engineers, expert witnesses, and others, their eyes fixed on the man at the end.

Richard had never seen him before, though he, of course, knew him by reputation. His reputation con-

sisted merely in the fact that he made £30,000 a year at the Parliamentary Bar.

At first glance the bloated appearance of this sexagenarian was a blow to Richard. The K.C. looked more like a beadle than anything else.

Richard walked towards him and placed his papers on the table.

Mr. Gregg stared at him. He did not offer his hand. Mr. Gregg's stare was, in very truth, the secret of his huge success. It had made him Standing Counsel to half our railway companies, many of our wealthiest corporations, and the ideal advocate of the promoters of piers, tramways, docks, &c. The glare had earned him the invaluable reputation of never deceiving a Committee. Therefore, all promoters of possibly possible schemes desired his assistance. True, his respect for his own reputation prevented him from actually appearing in the committee rooms in a prominent manner on their behalf. But he would drop in to examine an influential witness. He would aggressively cross-examine at great length a witness of no possible importance.

In cases which he actually fought he gave the glare full play. Electrical or mechanical engineers, friends of his own, hearty diners at his home, blurted out inconvenient truths when suddenly confronted by the glare. He would turn it on learned brothers who made valid objections to such and such proceedings. The glare destroyed the vitality of the objections. Even on chairmen of the Committee would he turn the glare. Instantly they saw the error of their ways. Unhappily, the nature of the glare is indescribable, as the glare itself is inimitable. It was, perhaps, the horror of superhuman intelligence at incredible ignorance.

Also, as has been stated, it was worth £30,000 a year.

When Richard said:

"I'm very sorry, Mr. Gregg, but I was detained at the Old Bailey," he received the glare in its most acute form.

The effect on him was curious. He had just won an unexpected acquittal in a charge against a curate, and he felt in high humour with himself. The glare struck him—it must be said—as comic!

He smiled.

But, of course, only slightly.

"Where?" The voice of the fat man was shrill, a voice entirely out of harmony with his architecture, out of all harmony with the glare.

The smile broadened. "The Old Bailey—in London."

The glare ricocheted, and Mr. Gregg, aghast, sank back into his chair.

The promoters, the solicitors, the various experts were nervous at the tension.

Then Richard sat down in the chair on his leader's right.

Mr. Gregg's frame heaved with ill-suppressed indignation. This was the first time in all his experience that the glare had failed.

At length he spoke, panting:

"That's all, I think, gentlemen?"

Obviously Richard was not included in the question.

In a courteous but unconcerned voice he addressed Gregg:

"There are one or two points—"

"We've been into them—before you came," frowned the great K.C.

"I'm very sorry, but—"

Utterly ignoring him, the other turned to a genial old gentleman, six feet high and massively handsome, a leading expert in tramways:

"A word with you, Mr. Hodgkins."

This was the signal to terminate the consultation.

Richard, as the others filed out of the room, felt that it would be useless for him to remain behind. Mr. Milbury, however, an energetic and bustling little man, prematurely middle-aged, with a round face, turned-down collar, red tie, and fluttering coat-tails, intruded himself on Mr. Gregg. He did not like the manner in which the leader had treated Richard. He foresaw trouble, and he blamed himself. For he recognised that he had not asked him what junior he would prefer. Already he regretted that Meyville had been briefed. Mr. Gregg might easily have revenge for a slight by not attending at all to the Sudbury-on-Tritham Electric Tramway Bill. For a great man, Mr. Gregg was singularly liable to be discomposed by small things.

"At eleven to-morrow, Mr. Gregg, eh?"

The glare came into operation.

"Of course."

"Lord Lashbridge is the chairman."

"I—know."

Then Mr. Milbury retreated.

On Richard's return to the Temple, somewhat mystified by the first meeting with a Parliamentary lawyer, Moseley produced a barrister's bag made of some silky red fabric, with "R. M." embroidered on it in white.

"Mr. Charles Gault has sent you this, sir."

Richard expressed delight. Charlie Gault was one of the most popular men at the Bar. It pleased him

very much that the gift should have come from that genial K. C.

"You ought to have had a red bag long ago, sir. Still, perhaps it looked more unobtrusive to use a blue one when you were so obviously entitled to the other. Anyhow, it's just in time."

"I don't understand."

"You know, sir, that you aren't allowed to take a blue bag into the Committee Rooms." A little uneasily he asked, "Have you never been into a Committee Room, sir?"

"Never."

"If I had known that, I should have advised you to go down and take a look round. However," he added, with every confidence in Richard, "*you'll* pick it up easily enough, sir. The procedure is simple enough. More like a drawing-room than anything else."

Richard thought that Gregg's manner would be somewhat more out of place in a drawing-room than anywhere else.

Then the clerk obtained permission to give Mr. Gault's clerk the usual receipt of a guinea on the presentation of a red bag, and retired.

The telephone bell rang.

"Is that you, Dick?"

"Yes, dear."

"All right about Saturday?"

A smile came into his face.

"Yes, darling."

"Nothing can possibly interfere?"

"Nothing."

"I am still your favourite person?"

"First favourite. The rest, non-starters."

"Something's worrying you."

"How the dickens can you tell?"

"By my darling's voice."

"You know me too well!"

"What is it?"

"Nothing much. But I'm appearing in the Lords to-morrow for the first time. And I'm not sure of myself."

"Is my love in a blue funk?"

"No," he laughed, "but a little nervous. Lashbridge is the chairman."

"He'll help you."

"I'm hanged if he shall!"

"Anyhow, you'll be all right. And you'll tell me all about it on Saturday. I'm only *just* living till then."

"Same here. Good-bye, darling."

The next morning Richard, walking across the Park on his way to Westminster, caught sight of Gwendolen riding by the baby-walk. He waved to her, and she came up to the railings for a chat. On a handsome bay hack, and wearing a perfectly cut grey habit, she looked, perhaps, at her best. The graceful lines of her figure were in marked contrast to the heavy limpness or too sharp outlines of the other women. She beamed with happiness and was anxious to talk. But he was in a hurry. So, having received a few words of encouragement as to the Lords, and certain instructions as to Saturday, he crossed the Row in high spirits. What did the Lords matter when he was loved with such a love by such a woman?

He turned admiring eyes to follow her. Fred Robinson, an obscure novelist, with a figure like a note of interrogation, in a white bowler, and riding a light chestnut, joined her. He toyed with an imaginary whisker, and she laughed encouragingly.

"Good Heavens!" thought Richard, "she's the best-natured woman in the world—to stand a man like—that."

Moseley met Richard in the lobby of the House of Commons and preceded him down a narrow, iron-balustraded staircase into the barristers' robing-room, a sort of cellar, looking out on to a courtyard. Here several counsel, leaders and juniors, all strangers to Richard, were being robed by their clerks while talking familiarly to one another. He could hear whispers, not altogether friendly, of "Who's that?" So far as he could gather, the question could not be satisfactorily answered. The atmosphere seemed hostile. And, indeed, it was. The Parliamentary Bar is a close corporation, to which admission should be obtained in the orthodox way—one should be the pupil of a Parliamentary counsel, or the son of a Parliamentary agent, or the near relative of a peer. One should certainly not be an Old Bailey barrister. None of these men knew that Richard had ever appeared at the Old Bailey, or, indeed, that he was Richard Meyville. But they saw that he was a stranger, and they felt that they did not need him among the flesh-pots. The richer the flesh-pots, the more zealously must they be guarded.

Richard found himself in a large, airy room with windows overlooking the Thames. In front of him, at a horseshoe table, sat the committee, with Lashbridge in the centre. On the wall facing the windows was a huge map of Sudbury-on-Tritham.

On his right-hand side were the score or so of counsel employed in the case. They appeared for the borough council, the local county council, all sorts of councils, railway companies, frontages, and private owners. Many were there simply to say that they did

not propose to offer any opposition. Some were prepared to settle on terms. At the long table, littered with red bags, documents, and plans, they were sitting in uncomfortable confusion, in places, two or three deep.

Richard's brand new bag amongst the old and dingy ones made a scarlet note of colour, not at all pleasing to him. Its newness looked terribly amateurish.

Suddenly Mr. Godalming, the solicitor for the promoters, a good-looking, middle-aged man with an eye-glass, tapped him on the back:

"Mr. Gregg's clerk has just told me that he can't get away from a committee of the Commons. You'll have to open."

"Very well," said Richard. But a cold shudder ran down his back. He had never expected to make the opening speech, though, of course, he had prepared notes. He would have given anything to have, once in his life, heard somebody perform the task. A precedent would have helped him vastly. As things were, he was like a bridegroom who, at the altar rails, is suddenly called upon to perform the ceremony.

"Why didn't that infernal old Gregg come?" he asked himself.

Why? For these reasons. During the last two years he had noticed that his powers, except those of over-eating, were on the wane. He had, therefore, abandoned, as far as possible, the most difficult parts of the Bills for which he was retained. He preferred to examine certain unimportant witnesses at great length, or to cross-examine witnesses who were unfamiliar with Committees, if his case was a poor one. If, on the other hand, its preamble was likely to be proved, he would devote a good deal of his attention

to it. But the preamble of the Sudbury-on-Tritham Electric Tramways Bill stood little chance of passing the Lords. Further, its promoters were not overburdened with money. They had, indeed, only employed two counsel, and they had not consulted him as to his junior. They had chosen an Old Bailey barrister! Pshaw! He was well out of it. It was much better for him to sit in a Committee of the Commons listening to Mr. Balfour Browne.

Richard rose and began his speech to interested silence. All the counsel by now knew who he was. He was the man who defended the Yoghi—the worst type of Yoghi. Were there not plenty of good men at the Parliamentary Bar who could be employed without going to the Central Criminal Court to get hold of defenders of Yoghis? He was a good-looking, clever-looking man. If he succeeded with the Bill—and old Gregg had been foolish enough to give him the chance—he might come permanently to Westminster. That would take bread out of somebody's mouth—possibly mine—so each argued.

Obviously, he was nervous. For the first time in his life he felt himself nervous. The fact alarmed him. He almost regarded it as a symptom of disease. Sometimes the word would not come. Sometimes he got entangled in a phrase. Perspiration came to his brow. He was making a desperately bad show—and before Lashbridge. Suddenly some one rose to object—he mentioned something about Standing Orders. Now Richard knew no more about the Standing Orders of the House of Lords than he knew about Cyclopæan architecture in Polynesia.

Evidently the other man expected a reply. Richard had none to give him. There was silence. Then Lash-

bridge explained the matter, adding, "Perhaps Mr. Meyville is not very familiar with the procedure of the committees—at present," he added, with a kindly smile that sent the blood hotly through the barrister's veins.

Richard, apparently, could say nothing right or in the right way. He was as one attempting to play cricket by the rules of football. At almost every sentence came interruption or objection. Lashbridge—though a smile, half concealed behind his hand, and very galling to the embarrassed counsel, played about his lips—evidently did his best to help. But the performance was absolutely humiliating.

Help, however, came from Lord Robert Stackville, a son of Lord Wiltshire's, a long, stooping man with the wan, eager face of the Stackvilles, and the long, lean, talented hands of that brilliant stock.

He appeared for the Sudbury-on-Tritham District Council, which was in favour of the scheme. He courteously brought considerable light to Richard's quick intelligence.

Then things improved; he began to feel his ground.

But Godalming, in despair, had rushed off to procure Gregg. He brought him back, almost by main force, puffing and furious.

He interrupted the miserable Richard to administer advice and maledictions which made the position all the worse. At last he blurted out—audible to all the room—"You infernal idiot."

Richard paused, looked down at him with burning eyes. Then, calmly to the Committee:

"My lords, I think it would be more convenient both for the committee and myself if my learned friend—on the other side—would cease his obstruction."

Everyone held his breath. Never had Gregg been so insulted.

"I quite agree with you, Mr. Meyville," said Lashbridge firmly.

Gregg rose, purple with passion, giving the glare full play.

"That is your lordship's opinion?"

"It is."

"Then there is only one course open to me."

"Which you will, therefore, be compelled to take."

A mountain of defeated pomposity, Gregg lumbered out of the room.

This episode, astounding to practitioners at Westminster, where a "scene" is practically unknown, gave new confidence to Richard. He felt himself at home—in the King's Bench. He finished his speech in a few minutes, and then called his first witness. Examination-in-chief is almost as difficult, though not so showy an art, as cross-examination.

Now Richard was a master of it, and although the latitude allowed in questions by the committee simplified the task enormously, yet his skill was evident.

At lunch-time Moseley brought him sandwiches and a whisky-and-soda, whispering in a confident voice, "It's all right, sir."

These words were balm to him.

His witnesses turned out well, and he got the best out of them. The holes made in their armour by the other side he skilfully repaired under cross-examination. When the committee adjourned till Monday, he had thrust the memory of his opening speech to the back of his brain.

The robing-room was full, vibrant with talk. On his

entrance a hush fell over it. In his shirt by the window stood Gregg, arranging his tie.

Instantly he turned to Richard:

"What do you mean, young man—what the devil do you mean by calling me 'on the other side'—me, your leader?"

The young man walked up to him and said calmly but deliberately:

"Because you called me an 'infernal idiot,' so I called you the rudest thing I could think of at the moment. But I've had time to think over the matter, and—I can be much more accurate now—if you like."

He was prepared to use the word "cad."

Gregg foresaw it, and shrank from it. There were several men in the room who hoped for it.

Gregg, however, conscious, it may have been, that the word was well deserved, closed the episode by turning abruptly away, growling gruffly to himself.

To John Moseley this scene, witnessed by King's Counsel, stuff-gownsmen, and clerks, appeared very ill-advised. He respected age. He respected success. Also, Richard's attack on an eminent man wounded him in his tenderest part, his respect for the tradition of the Bar.

Sympathetic winks from other clerks reassured him—in a measure. Richard's conduct must have done him an immense amount of good or an immense amount of harm. As he helped him off with his robes, handed him his tie and hat, he looked curiously into his face. As Richard tied his tie his eyes calmly regarded his reflection in the glass. His mouth was compressed, his chin looked aggressive. A tiring, embarrassing, almost disastrous day had produced no effect upon him.

The thought that summed up the matter in John's

mind was, "I've backed a winner—in a big race."

The two went up to the lobby, which was thronged by bustling, busy people who seemed to bustle about no particular business. Many other people watched this performance with reverent awe.

"Are you coming back to the Temple, sir?"

"Not unless there is a conference. I tell you what, I'm dead tired. I'm afraid I've made an awful mess of it."

"No, sir, I think not. We began badly. But we're all right now, sir." Then, confidentially, he continued, "It's a pity that you haven't had any experience of this sort of work. But somehow or other we must get out of this."

"I agree. How? How can I learn Parliamentary procedure in twenty minutes?"

"I've arranged it, sir."

"How?"

John became more confidential.

"You know Mr. Torrance?"

Richard knew him by name as a K.C. who did a great deal of Parliamentary work.

"Well, sir, he's in a very bad way just now. You know, he made a lot of bad investments—speculations in concerns he appeared for—wild-cat, some of 'em. If he'd gone bankrupt it would have been all up with him—just the same as if he had been mixed up in a divorce case. So he arranged with his creditors. His clerk's his receiver—for his fees. They allow him £2,000 a year. And he'll pay them off. Torrance is an honourable man, sir."

"But how does the honesty or impecuniosity of Mr. Torrance help me?"

"In this way. He's coming to the Temple on Sun-

day morning at 11 o'clock to go through the case with you. We shall have the printed shorthand note to-morrow morning, and he'll tell you exactly what to do. In a few hours you, sir, being what you are, will know as much as he does."

"I shall be out of town on Sunday."

John's figure straightened. His eyes were piercing. He was no longer the clerk. He was the partner. The dominant partner.

"No, you will be in the Temple on Sunday. This Bill has got to be pulled through."

Richard hesitated. John's eyes searched his face.

"I don't know, sir, that there are any courts—in England—that sit on Sunday. I, as your clerk, know of no appointment for Sunday."

He was compelled to yield:

"I will be there."

"Fifty guineas was the sum I mentioned to Mr. Torrance."

"You don't mean to say that a K.C. takes money for—tutoring?"

"He has a son in a cavalry regiment."

"Fifty guineas is a lot of money."

"It would be worth your while to pay five hundred guineas to get this Bill through. And, judging by Lord Lashbridge's manner, he'll help you all he can. Which is a lot. He is the committee."

"John, you're wonderful. I shall not come to chambers to-morrow. Eleven o'clock on Sunday."

At that moment Sir Andrew Kytnow, the member for South Kensington, hailed him:

"Hullo, Meyville. How are you? I hear you've fallen foul of Gregg. Quite right. Pompous ass! I

always snub him myself when he appears before me on committees. And how is Mrs. Ainslie?"

John turned away with an almost imperceptible shrug of the shoulders. "She ought to be dead," he said to himself.

CHAPTER XXI

"WOPSERING"

RICHARD drove to Green Street, where he found Gwen in the drawing-room. Unfortunately, in the company of Wilfred.

The little man welcomed him with enthusiastic reproaches.

"My dear Richard, I'm delighted to see you. I hardly ever see anything of you. Since you've done so well for yourself, you don't seem to remember your old friend—and lately I've been far from well, very far from well, indeed."

Gwen interposed:

"Much farther from well than usual—by many hundred cubits."

"Gwen does not exaggerate. Some of my symptoms are probably unique in the history of medicine. I have serious thoughts on my death—which cannot be long delayed—of bequeathing my body to the Royal College of Surgeons. It would be a revelation to that most incompetent of all professions. I tell you," he continued very seriously, "if I'd employed a medical man I'd be dead, Richard, that's what I'd be—not to mince matters—dead!"

"Oh, Wilfred! don't be absurd!" smiled his wife.

"She takes no interest in me, not a particle. She's as strong as a horse. Doesn't know what a headache is, certainly not one of *my* headaches."

He spoke as though he had invented a special brand. "And she's jealous of the interest that people take in me. Now, I don't tell everybody, Richard"—here he took the young man familiarly by the arm—"what I'm going to tell you."

And, in spite of Gwen's remonstrance, he gave Richard a good half hour's lecture on his miscellaneous maladies.

"My dear Wilfred," said Gwen when he had finished, "all this is due to your taking a course of Dr. Johnson's Radium Pills for Robust People. They didn't agree with *you* at all."

"I must try everything, mustn't I? Besides, there aren't such pills."

"I know," she said sweetly. "You think yourself a sort of Registry Office for Patent Medicines in which a sample must be deposited."

He ignored her definition and appealed to Dick.

"She takes no notice of me. Just when I want to go and have a look at Harrogate to see if it might suit me, she goes off to-morrow to stay with people of the name of Wopser!"

An uncontrollable smile came over Richard's face. He dared not look at Gwen.

"You may laugh, but there *are* such people—the Reverend Wopser, Theodore Wopser. Gwen was at school with his wife. A wretched little country parson in the vicarage where there isn't room to swing a cat!"

"Clergymen do not require to swing cats. They are kind-hearted as a class," Richard said, by way of excuse for his continued merriment.

"Anyhow, there's not room for Gwen's maid. But Gwen is so fond of Mrs. Wopser—devil of a name—

that's she always week-ending there. How often have you been to the Wopsers' this year?"

He turned to his wife, who, vibrating with laughter, held *Les Egarements de Marcel*, the latest atrocity of *l'ineffable Boulevardier* "Willy," before her face.

"About six times."

"I see nothing funny," he exclaimed with vacant eyes. "Richard, you have influence with my wife. Can't you persuade her to drop the Wopsers? I am sure they are awful people—though I've never seen them. What a name! Wopser! My God! Anyhow, Gwen, I will never have the Wopsers in my house. How could I say to any friend of mine: 'Allow me to introduce you to Mr. Wopser.' I couldn't do it."

"The Wopsers will not come here, dear. Nelly Wopser has a great aversion to invalids."

"Good." Then seized with an idea, he asked Richard to accompany him to Harrogate.

Richard pleaded work in the Temple.

"That's a lie," said Wilfred. "I know it's a lie; I can always tell when anyone lies to me. If Gwen were to tell me a lie, I could detect it at once. She knows that as well as I do, and doesn't dare to. It's a fact, old chap."

Gwen shot an incredulous glance at him.

"You never do *anything* for me." Her husband asked querulously, "How often do I invite you to lunch or dinner and you don't come? Even Gwen is annoyed every now and then. I'm not going to Harrogate alone. I shall now go to the Club and try and get some one to come with me. And the chances are a thousand to one I shall find a bore. There's one thing I can't tolerate, and that's a bore."

When he had gone huffily out of the room, Richard said:

"If that is really his view of bores, suicide is his only course."

In an instant they were in each other's arms.

"You must love me very much to stand him," she smilingly said.

He threw himself into a chair.

"Tired?" she asked. "You're overworking. There are lines round your dear eyes. I don't like them. Remember, I love you for your looks alone, and I don't know what these lines come from. I'll kiss the lines away."

Abruptly, he said:

"Wopsering is off."

She jumped up from his knees.

There was a flash of anger in her eyes:

"You're joking. You oughtn't to joke about that. That's sacred."

"I'm not joking."

"Oh, this is too cruel," she cried. "I've been thinking about to-morrow for days. You can't disappoint me. What are you going to do? Why can't we go to the St. Alphonse. You've taken the suite. What has happened?" Then in a softened tone, "My darling isn't ill?"

He told her of what had happened in the Lords and of his appointment for Sunday. As a human being she was reasonable: as a woman she was—a woman. She admitted that she must yield. But she shed a few tears.

"Forgive me," she said, brushing them away, "but I was looking forward to it so much."

A woman doesn't need to be a coquette when she is

sure of a man's love. In such a case coquetry is an insult either to his intelligence or to her own.

"So was I. But we can Wopser next week."

"Promise," she insisted, her fingers closing over his.

"I swear."

The process of Wopsering was simple.

Gwen would drive in a cab to Victoria Station, and have her luggage—very little—taken to the cloak-room. Then she would apparently change her mind, employ another porter, have the luggage placed inside a four-wheeler, and drive to the St. Alphonse Hotel, where Richard, as Mr. Mason, had engaged a convenient suite, from which they did not emerge till Monday morning.

In consideration of Nelly Wopser's slight collaboration in the matter, the wife of the impecunious Theobald was the best-dressed woman in the parish—owing to clothes for which Gwen had no further use. Had it not been for the beauty of her apparel, it is doubtful whether Mrs. Wopser—"Mrs. Alibi" as Richard called her—would have found favour in the sight of a somewhat critical stockbroker in the district.

"Anyhow, Richard, you can take me to St. Alphonse to-morrow night. I shall have the wire from Nelly, a child will have whooping-cough. Wilfred will be at Harrogate. Please?"

The St. Alphonse is a convenient hotel in the neighbourhood of Leicester-square, where, for a moderate sum, a small suite of rooms can be obtained. The cooking is excellent. The approach is ideal, at the end of a long *cul-de-sac*, in which no person of any social position is ever seen.

He suggested certain rooms off St. James's Street. True, they were more costly. Still, now that he was

making money, he need not hesitate about finance. And the rooms were really beautiful.

Suddenly he exclaimed:

"We needn't postpone the Wopsers at all. I can leave you on Sunday morning, go to the Temple, and come back to my darling, who will be waiting for me."

"Splendid!" she cried, clapping her hands together. So the matter was settled.

"Be at the St. Alphonse at seven to-morrow," he said as he went out.

"Wearing a dress of Paquin's that I know you'll like."

In an ecstasy of contemplative delight Gwen threw herself at full length on the sofa.

On the Sunday morning she awoke, heavy with love languor. On our return to consciousness our first thought is of the anxiety or the joy that occupied our minds when we fell asleep. Her first thought was of Richard. He obsessed her brain. And, as she turned, wearily emerging from the clouds of sleep, she gave a little cry of delight as she saw him by her side. How splendid he looked! His hair scarcely dishevelled, his profile handsome in its irregularity, his neck like a white column. For a dark man his skin seemed singularly pale. He lay with his head turned towards her, in an attitude of easy grace. She listened to his calm, regular breathing, the sweetest of all music in her ears. With a rapid movement of her hand she scattered the dream dust shed by Night, and sat up to gaze at him, to absorb his beauty. But she hesitated to kiss his closed eyelids, though she brought her lips down close to his. He might wake. How lucky, indeed, was she that he was altogether hers! And yet that calm face belonged to a strenuous fighting man, a man who stood

between shivering criminals and justice. From those lips fell words that sent men into penal servitude. Those lips kissed hers. From those eyes shot glances that made trembling witnesses reveal their secrets. Those eyes looked at her with love, only at her with love.

"Darling Richard," she murmured, as she stole from the room.

She returned, having bathed, and driven away the mist of sleep, fragrant as a flower, her skin white and inviting as a camelia.

In her eyes flashed two brilliant stars of tenderness as she noticed that in his sleep his right arm had stretched out to where her head had reposed.

She nestled by his side.

Instantly she saw a fluttering of his eyelashes. Then the eyes opened, and his lips parted with a smile of complete happiness.

Her white teeth, whiter by contrast with the full, fresh lips, were irresistible. Instantly, he brushed away the cobwebs of sleep. He kissed the violet rings under her eyes. Her skin was cool, opalescent. He kissed her on the lips; and his lips were held tight by hers.

Again and again he kissed her lips with violent, idolatrous love, the love that absorbs every method of loving. The morning light played on her neck lending it a sheen like satin. He kissed her neck.

"Oh, Richard, oh, Richard," she murmured.

* * * * *

At half-past ten he left the hotel and drove down to the Temple.

There he found John, evidently in an evil humour.

"You look tired, sir," he said, with an almost malicious twist of his mouth. "I thought perhaps you weren't coming." His lips shut tight.

Abruptly Richard answered:

"Not coming!" Then, on his way through the passage he stopped and asked sternly, "What do you mean?"

"I thought perhaps you might have—a more important engagement."

The clerk's tone was irritating, practically impertinent.

Richard, coldly surprised, stared at him.

"Mr. Torrance sent me a message yesterday to say that 11.30 this morning would suit him better than eleven. So I telephoned to Gloucester Terrace. Lady Meyville told me you had gone to Brighton till Monday. She didn't know which hotel. I tell you, sir, I didn't know which way to turn. I couldn't believe that you'd miss the appointment for—anything. So I telephoned to Mrs. Ainslie, and told her who I was, and explained the matter. She said I needn't be uneasy, as she knew for a fact that you'd come down this morning."

"I see. I said I would be here and I am—am—here."

But the clerk did not go.

"Well?"

"It's very awkward for me, sir. I ought to know where you are. Supposing anything were to happen when you're *supposed* to be at Brighton?"

The emphasis went home.

The evident justice of the man's protest made it the more galling.

"What made you think of Mrs. Ainslie? Why did you telephone to Mrs. Ainslie?" he asked, sharply.

The clerk met his eyes and answered deliberately:

"Oh—I *know*, sir. And, what's more," the words came hotly, "you ought to stop it."

Richard rose, livid.

"What the devil do you mean by talking to me like that? How dare you? Are you my clerk or aren't you?"

John was as white as the other.

"In a sense I am your partner, sir. And—this—may ruin your practice."

He had shot a piercing shaft.

The position was intolerable. Barristers' clerks have often remonstrated on the drinking habits of their employers, have even dragged them reeling from the neighbouring taverns. But, probably, never before had a clerk attempted to interfere in a barrister's love affairs.

Richard knew that the man was within his rights, that he was giving—from his point of view—shrewd counsel. Were not the idea itself so preposterous, John would have been entitled to insist on his yielding. It was not part of their bargain that he should render himself amenable to the Divorce Court. Still, the notion that anyone should attempt to bring about an estrangement from Gwendolen struck him as grotesque.

He could not attack John. He could not defend himself. He, therefore, nodded as a dismissal:

"I understand."

The grim tone in which he spoke froze further conversation on John's lips.

He went from the room glad that he had said something, regretful that he had not said more.

At last Torrance arrived, a thin, grey man, with a deep guttural voice and a coarse skin. His hands were thin and very dry, almost colourless. His nose was

broad, intelligent, and aggressive. His brittle nails were square, ribbed, and dirty. He was not modern, and his face suggested that of an actor made up as an attorney in some early Victorian play.

He placed on Richard's table the printed shorthand note of Friday's evidence, which he had carefully read, sat down, and adjusted a tortoise-shell-rimmed pince-nez.

By one o'clock he had explained to Richard the errors of his opening speech.

Then he said, brusquely, "Now we adjourn."

On their return from the Savoy, the K.C. explained to his interested listener the best method of conducting the Bill, and of replying for the promoters. Incidentally, he congratulated him upon his examination of witnesses, and made several bitter allusions to Mr. Gregg. By five o'clock, when he rose to go, Richard had learnt a vast amount about Parliamentary procedure; he felt that he could go down to Westminster on Monday with absolute confidence in himself, but with considerably less in his case.

Richard was profuse in his thanks as the lean K. C. went out.

In the passage John handed him the hardly-earned—for a Parliamentary barrister—fifty guineas in notes and gold.

"Of course, this is between ourselves."

"Of course, sir."

"Your chief is a very clever young man. He will go far. I wish I was beginning again," he added, with something of a sigh. He wondered whether the fifty guineas would be sufficient to get his son out of the current scrape.

Immediately afterwards Richard, eager to rejoin Gwen, left the Temple.

"John, Mr. Torrance doesn't seem to be very fond of Mr. Gregg."

"No, sir. I have heard that Mr. Gregg let him into a concern in which he lost twenty thousand pounds. If it hadn't been for your—little brush—with Mr. Gregg I don't think Mr. Torrance would have given you so much time to-day. Anyway, it was because you were against Mr. Gregg, and his being so hard up, that I—approached him."

"You're a diplomatist, John."

"A barrister's clerk has to be a bit of all sorts—a bit of a detective sometimes."

"Good day," he answered, not altogether pleased at John's description of the versatility required in his calling.

At the hotel Gwen welcomed him with delight; she didn't even reproach him for having been so long away.

"I've ordered dinner for seven sharp," she said; "and I've ordered a simple, an absurd dinner. Lobster *à la Américaine* and grouse and steak and Burgundy."

"Then," he smiled, "the manager will know we are not married."

"And you are to have coffee to-night."

"Why?"

"Because coffee always keeps you awake."

"All right, darling."

Then he questioned her about John and the telephone message.

Why hadn't she told him?

"My dearest, when one is with the man one loves one has—one should have—something better to talk about than a telephone message from a complete stranger. To have remembered it would have been an insult to you."

The dinner was delightful.

Both were in high spirits.

"By the bye," she said suddenly, leaning across the table, the pink lights shining on the jewels on her tapering, waxen fingers, "you ought to belong to the Siddons Club and the Gridiron. And it's very nice of me to make this suggestion, because I know what will happen. After the theatre, you will go to supper at the Siddons—and I shall have to drive home alone with an ache in my heart in a cold brougham. Oh, dearest, you've no idea how cold a brougham feels, especially at night, when *you've* got out of it. But you must certainly belong to the Gridiron. Belonging to the Gridiron registers a man as a celebrity and a good fellow."

The tone in which she gave this excellent advice was caressing and tender. He took each hand and kissed it in turn.

"Lashbridge tells me that he will propose you for both."

Stiffly Richard answered:

"He will do nothing of the sort. I shall be put up by Tufnell or Charlie Gault, or someone of my own profession."

"You're still stubborn about Lashbridge."

"I'm not going to accept favours from a man who is in love with you."

"Would you like everybody else in the world to hate me? I believe you would."

"No," he said fiercely, but affectionately pressing her cheeks: "I want everybody else to admire you—hopelessly."

"Lashbridge admires hopelessly."

"But he has the greatest chance."

"You know—that?" she laughed.

"You like him, and—he's the sort of man that would suit you. You would get on with him. If I thought I were telling you news, I shouldn't tell it you."

"Patrick."

"Irish, perhaps, but it expresses my feelings. If anything were to happen to me, I believe Lashbridge would be my successor."

"How little you know me," she protested, smiling and shaking her head, "how foolishly, grotesquely little! I'll tell you the truth. If I had met him before I met you I—might. A woman, a self-respecting woman, is not going to her grave without finding out what love is. She knows it means—something. Curiosity compels her to find out—what. A lot of so-called love is merely curiosity. But in you, my heart, I found love itself. Many women go to their graves, contented mothers, stolidly happy wives, without ever suspecting its real existence."

"And I showed it to you?"

"Yes," she said, her eyes gleaming with happiness. "That's why I must always love you. That's why you must always love me. If any other woman——" But she did not finish her sentence. A wild, strange gleam came into her eyes. He had never seen her look like that before. He had no knowledge of any action of hers which could be in harmony with this strange expression. Evidently in her temperament there existed a force of which he was unaware. Just so he had, when reconstructing a murder, imagined that the criminal had looked at the moment of his crime. In this manner a tigress might glare when fighting to the death for her young. Gwen would fight to the death for his love. He kissed each quivering eyelid, and when she looked at him again only tenderness shone in her eyes.

Reassured, he laughed.

"Some souls," she said, "have the power of merging themselves in another, and when the other is gone the power of loving is gone too. One is compelled to live in the memory of past happiness, happiness that I can't explain, even to you!"

"The only possible explanation of happiness is that—well, that one is happy."

"And that one is going to be happy, eh? It's half-past ten. Time for all good barristers to be in bed."

CHAPTER XXII

A GREAT TRIUMPH

AS RICHARD was leaving the St. Alphonse on the Monday morning on his way to Westminster, he met the manager of the hotel, the effulgent and suave Moziss.

"I hope you have been comfortable during your stay, Mr.—Meyville," he said with a bright, fat smile, and cheerfully rubbing his hands together.

Richard threw him a quick glance. Why did this man called him "Meyville" instead of his *nom d'hôtel* "Mason."

"I have been comfortable, thank you," he answered coldly, and was on the point of moving away, reflecting that this must be his last visit to an extremely convenient establishment, and for the first time in his life realising that the fact of being a celebrity had its drawbacks.

But the manager persisted:

"Really, sir, I trust you will permit me to congratulate you on the speech you made in the breach of promise case the other day. That was what won me over, that and the fact that you are such a good client. All the other jurymen wanted to return a verdict with thumping damages for the plaintiff, but your speech won my sympathy, sir—and you have always been so complimentary about the hotel that I—well—stood out."

"Yes, yes," Richard replied, "and the jury disagreed. I remember."

"I was the only jurymen who disagreed, sir," answered the manager. "But you are such a good client."

"Thank you," said Richard stiffly, "I have been very comfortable."

As he passed out into the street he reflected, "It's astonishing that in a country where they prohibit gambling they should permit—justice!"

All that day and the greater part of Tuesday he spent over the Sudbury-on-Tritham Electric Tramway Bill.

Before the committee, to the intense surprise of the other counsel engaged in the case, he showed an intimate knowledge of Parliamentary procedure. The report that a new-comer of extraordinary ability had risen spread with marvellous rapidity. From the various committee rooms came Parliamentary agents, solicitors, and quasi-jealous juniors. The thing in itself was almost a miracle. Hitherto no barrister had come straight, as it were, from the Old Bailey, fully equipped to his finger-tips with a knowledge of Parliamentary procedure. It was noted that Lashbridge, a difficult and somewhat haughty chairman of committees, treated him almost with deference. He spoke to him as though he felt for him that respect which was only due to men like Gregg or Jack Bishop, the leader of the Parliamentary Bar.

Towards the end of Tuesday afternoon Lashbridge "cleared the room" whilst he and his colleagues considered their decision.

Outside in the corridor, Richard walked up and down with John. Every now and then the clerk was approached by various people—strangers to his master. To them he talked with his chest expanded, his fingers in his arm-holes, after the manner of one whose privilege it was to confer favours.

Not all at once did he give affirmative answers to the people anxious to secure the services of Richard. He had value to dispose of, and he would only dispose of it to

the highest bidder. His hat was cocked on one side, and he rather suggested an auctioneer presiding over the sale of a priceless and unique article of *vertu*.

At one of these moments it was that Lord Robert Stackville approached Richard. The wan, intellectual face of the barrister lighted with a smile.

"I congratulate you, Meyville, most heartily. You have done exceedingly well. I sincerely hope that you will be one of us now."

"It's very kind of you to say that," Richard answered. "I think I'm beginning to know the ropes now."

"But you'll never get this Bill through," said Lord Robert.

"Why not?"

"For one reason, my dear sir, tramways are things of the past. Any money that is now invested in tramways must be lost. Besides, Lashbridge is the worst possible man for your purpose."

"Why?" asked Richard, with quick, questioning eyes.

"Simply because he is chairman of the Great Southern Railway. No chairman of a railway can look with favour on tramways. But, mind you, you had an absolutely hopeless case from the beginning."

"It looked infernally hopeless at first," laughed Richard.

"It was hopeless, and it is now," explained Lord Robert. "But don't be in any way depressed by a first failure—especially the failure of an enterprise that was foredoomed. Of course, if you had managed to prove your preamble—single-handed, as you were—your triumph would have been colossal."

At that moment the door of the committee room opened and the counsel streamed in, followed by a huge group of people more or less interested in the Bill.

Richard and the various barristers engaged in the case sat down to listen for the decision.

"We find the preamble proved," stated Lashbridge briefly.

There was a gasp of amazement throughout the room.

Richard could scarcely believe his ears.

"And that's the man I mistrusted! Still, he has done—too much!" he said to himself.

There was a hectic flush on either cheek as, accompanied by the jubilant John carrying his red bag, he strode along the corridor.

When he had disrobed, he spoke for a few moments to the clerk in the lobby.

John's face shone with delight.

"This is the best day's work we have ever done, sir. I doubt whether any man at the Parliamentary Bar has ever had such a success. They are all talking about it. They can't say enough about it. I'll tell you a very good sign, sir. Two or three men have told me that they know of good sets of chambers in Westminster—cheap—comparatively."

This was news with a vengeance! So he was to set up a branch establishment, was he?

"Within the next week, sir, we shall be turning away work—the best sort of work."

Then his enthusiasm mastered him.

"I do sincerely hope, sir, that I shall always know where you are when you are—not at Brighton."

Richard made no reply. The two jumped into a cab and sped to the Temple, where three consultations had been arranged.

By six o'clock Richard had finished work and set out on his walk homeward.

Very varying had been his frame of mind during these homeward walks.

He remembered that he had passed the Post Office in the Strand, feeling dejected, almost hopeless of his future. He had walked past the Cecil, heated with the reminiscence of some trivial triumph. How trivial all these triumphs seemed now! What was his success in the Yoghi and Priscilla? The most highly paid services are those which relate to large financial interests. He remembered that he had struggled—perhaps for five hours, in the Whitechapel County Court—five hours, relieved only by the genuine wit of the presiding judge—for a matter involving the sum of £5. Now he would struggle, with less mental wear and tear, in cases in which thousands, perhaps millions, were at stake, and he would be paid proportionately. The very visage of London alters before the successful man. Where previously he had seen gloomy, soulless buildings in the height of summer, now, in the middle of November, the street lamps gave him a cheery welcome, the glittering shops smiled at him.

Walking along Piccadilly, he was suddenly seized with the idea that he wanted a new hat. In the days of his impecuniosity he had often been in sore straits for clothes. But so good was his figure that even the clothing so much despised by the servants at Lashbridge, when lying in his portmanteau, had looked well cut on him. For his hats he had never paid more than fifteen shillings. Still, he had always selected hats that had something about them that was not suggestive of the City clerk. A young man with a clear-cut, intellectual face does not look, perhaps, the worse for wearing a silk hat that is not as effulgent as a stockbroker's.

He went into Benham and Heath's.

At the end of the shop he saw Billy Brinstable, talking

loudly to a couple of friends. The friends were overdressed persons with predatory noses like eagles, shining hats, and glistening black hair. They belonged to that race, which, in our day, shows such extraordinary aptitude for finance, but they were in no respect amiable representatives of that race.

Richard placed his hat on the counter.

The shopman, who resembled in appearance a very eminent dramatist, examined it with hostile care. The brim was limp to the touch, the lining was coloured like a meerschaum pipe.

While the man went in quest of a new one, Richard's eyes scanned the rows upon rows of white hat-boxes upon which were printed the most distinguished names in the kingdom. Peers, politicians, authors, financiers—Lord Lashbridge and Montague Cliftonville among them.

"I wonder," he thought to himself, "whether Messrs. Benham and Heath will ever think it wise to advertise my custom in this manner?"

Suddenly Billy sighted him, and approached him with vast enthusiasm.

The solicitor had grown fatter, redder, and more puffy about the eyes, more expansive in his movements since his marriage.

"My dear Dick," he cried, seizing his right hand between two chamois leather gloves, "my dear Dick, how are you, old horse? Here, Maurice! here, Litchenbaum! I want to introduce you to my brother-in-law. Here, you chaps, this is Mr. Richard Meyville, the eminent barrister. Mr. Albert Maurice, Mr. Z. Litchenbaum—what the dickens does Z. stand for, Litchenbaum?"

"Pleased to meet you," said Mr. Albert Maurice.

"Delighted to make your acquaintance," said Mr. Litchenbaum.

"Wonderful how times do change!" said Billy. "You wouldn't believe it, but when I became engaged to his sister—only at the beginning of last year—he was almost a briefless barrister. And now look at him! Turning work away!"

Billy spoke proudly, as though the fact that he had married Richard's sister had been the primary cause of the barrister's success.

A cynical but uncontrollable smile played about Richard's mouth.

"Now I'll tell you what we'll do," said Billy. "I'm giving a little dinner at the Carlton to-night. You'll dine with us?"

"Do," urged Mr. Albert Maurice.

"There is no one with whom I should be more pleased to have a little chat than you," pressed Mr. Z. Litchbaum.

"Ethel will be delighted to see you," said Billy. "These days you seem too busy to honour Billy's humble roof."

Richard was aghast at the idea of Ethel being seen in the company of these apparently shady—if not actually shady—financiers.

"I'm very sorry," he answered, "but I'm dining at home to-night."

"What!" cried Billy, "in that stuffy little place in Gloucester Terrace!"

"I'm dining with my mother," Richard replied.

The tone of reproach irritated Billy.

"Would you believe it?" he exclaimed. "Dick here is making thousands, and he still lives in Bayswater."

"I don't think," said Richard, looking coldly at Billy, "that my place of residence has anything to do with your friends." Then, in a lower voice, "I am very anxious to see Ethel. I have not seen her for some time. I

shall come and see her in a day or two. Good-night."

Then he turned away and tried on his hat.

"Yes, yes," he said, "that will do. Send it on." And he gave his name.

The shopman stared at him for an instant.

"That being the case, sir, I don't think you're choosing quite the right sort of hat. I think that a gentleman like you ought to have a more—distinguished hat. There's a great deal in the brim of a hat. We make for your brother, Mr. Cliftonville."

"Oh, do you?" commented Richard. "Yes, I see you do. I always imagined that he had his hats designed by an architect, not a mere hatter. I don't consider that a hat should be a sort of public monument."

"No, sir. But without being precisely theatrical, you should have what I might style a more eminent headgear. I've got the very thing, sir; just a slight difference in the width of the brim."

Richard knew that the man was right.

"Bring it here."

He tried it on. He looked in the glass. The improvement was enormous.

The hat to the eminent man is what the halo is to the saint. The halo does not add to the sanctity of the saint. But each explains to the passers-by in what company they have the good fortune to be.

"I think, perhaps, I had better make you another one, sir, and I will keep it here in one of those boxes, and when you are passing you can change it."

A smile of amused satisfaction stole over his face. So his hat was worthy of a place in the hierarchy of hats!

"If I were you, I don't think I should have this other—hat of yours"—and he toyed with the limp brim—"sent home, sir."

"Perhaps you are right," answered Richard.

"Beg pardon, sir," he said with a smile, "but I never thought that you and I—if I may say so, sir—would meet on what I might call friendly terms."

Richard stared at the man.

"And why not, pray? I don't understand."

"Why, sir, after the way you turned me inside out after the omnibus accident which I happened to witness from this door. At first I didn't recognise you without your wig. After all, sir, it really was too bad. I couldn't help witnessing the accident. That's a thing that might happen to anybody, but you made me appear the most terrible liar—you did, indeed, sir; and I'm not sure—speaking at this distance of time—that you didn't make me lie something horrible. It was very unpleasant for me to sit in the court with my wife—who had come for a day's outing—and hear you speak of me as the man 'Willis.'"

Richard recollected the incident, and apologised with a smile.

"I'm very sorry, Mr. Willis. But do you know that telling the truth is almost a lost art in this country?"

"Bless you, sir," answered the other. "It's absolutely impossible in the witness-box."

"There's a great deal of truth in that," reflected Richard, as he left the shop. "It's as hard to tell the truth in the Temple of Justice as it is to be amused in a theatre."

CHAPTER XXIII

CONCERNING THE LOYALTY OF LADY MEYVILLE

He walked rapidly along Piccadilly, and as he turned from Berkeley Street into Berkeley Square the fog had thickened. He took a strange pleasure in the mystic effect which it produced. In each of these houses in which only an occasional light gleamed were mysteries of love and sin and passion and desire; secrets only to be revealed by the process of the law. Each house in Berkeley Square possesses a characteristic of its own. Here was the house of a politician, there of an author, there of an actor, there of a philanthropic peer. In this square there is probably a more varied assortment of dwellers than in any other in London. The frontages of each bear even less resemblance to their neighbours than do the occupants themselves. But, suddenly, by the process of the law, all the secrets of the occupants may be revealed.

As he passed along the north side it gave him pleasure to reflect that some day from any of these houses a man or woman would lay bare to him a secret; that he would be a confessional as well, perhaps, as an avenging sword or a bulwark of defence in time of trouble.

The dramatic side of his profession fascinated him.

Were it not for John and his bargain with him he would certainly have preferred to specialise in the Divorce Court and in *causes célèbres*, whether in the King's Bench or in the Central Criminal Court.

He walked along Green Street and looked up at Mr. Ainslie's windows.

There were lights in the drawing-room.

He took out his watch. It was half-past seven; she hadn't gone up to dress.

For an instant he wavered. But an irresistible desire to see her seized him. He was warm with the glow of his triumph, and the natural completement of a man's success is appreciation from the lips and eyes of the woman he loves.

"Why wasn't she his wife?" he thought. How acute would have been the joy if it had been possible for him, with his own latchkey, to open that door to find her eagerly waiting for him. To dictate to her definitely, precisely, and suddenly as to which dress she was to wear, to whirl her off to a *tête-à-tête* dinner, and to walk proudly into a theatre in her company would be the joy of joys.

The great charm of married life, he thought, lay in its surprises. To say at a moment's notice, "We're going to dine out, and we're going to the theatre, and we're going to have a little supper after," or "Have your things packed up, darling, and we'll go to Brighton or Paris by the next train." As things were now, every pleasure had to be calculated and arranged for in advance.

He would go in.

He had no definite object before him. For a moment it struck him that they might dine together somewhere quietly and go to a music-hall. Still he hated music-halls. Gwendolen hated music-halls. In them was only to be found tedium and disappointment. The atmosphere, truly, was gay, but the dullard and the dolt alone apparently devoted their attention to the amusement of the English public.

Also, his mother was expecting him.

Yet he would love to see Gwendolen, if only for a minute.

He rang.

Younghusband showed him up to the drawing-room.

Gwendolen was seated by the fire, the glow shining on her face, and warming the pink silk of her gown.

On a sofa sat Lashbridge.

A perceptible cloud passed over Richard's face. "What the dickens was Lashbridge doing here at this hour?"

Gwendolen, with a cry of pleasure, rose.

So genuine was the cry that Richard felt that it must be intensely galling to Lashbridge. It sounded as music in his own ears.

Instantly she took him by both hands.

"My dear Dick, Lash has just been telling me of your triumph. He says you're the most wonderful man."

As she held his hands her eyes sparkled with enthusiasm and love.

Lashbridge, on the sofa, gazed at the two with a semi-smile. He patted his long, lean, white fingers together rapidly. Beyond that there was no symptom of the pain caused to him by Gwendolen's exhibition of proud love. But, evidently, he felt the situation intolerable. He saw himself out of the picture, and, for him, the sight of the picture was by no means pleasing.

Rising from the sofa, he said slowly:

"My dear Richard, I do congratulate you most heartily. At one time I was afraid. I really was quite nervous. I almost thought that you might break down. But I helped you—as I think you will admit—as much as I could."

"Of course I admit it," answered Richard, with as much enthusiasm as he could muster. "If you had

done anything to embarrass me further—well, I don't know what would have happened.”

Lashbridge smiled.

“I'm very pleased if my—may I say tact?—has helped you in taking a step—a somewhat important step—in what I am sure will be an eminent career.”

His manner was charming.

The only thing that made Richard doubt his absolute sincerity was the deliberate pomposity of the words. Had he been opening a bazaar, his language could not have been more artificial, more unlike the real man when he spoke real words. The genuine assistance that he had given him before the committee made this insincerity the more mysterious.

Then Gwen also thanked him. Her tone conveyed both to Lashbridge and to Richard her opinion that the favour shown to her lover had been inspired by her. But, in her words, there was no inkling of such a view.

Lashbridge took his leave.

“How long has he been here?” asked Richard before he kissed her.

“Three-quarters of an hour.”

“The devil!”

“My dear, dear Richard,” she protested.

“No, no, of course I don't suspect anything. But what do the servants think?”

“Servants don't think. They jump at wrong conclusions by a natural instinct.”

“That man, your butler, Younghusband, thinks you are making a fool of me. I saw it in his eyes.”

She laughed.

“If he knows anything, he knows better. Now, I want to be kissed, please. When you are happy you ought to be nice. Be nice, won't you, if only for—your

sake? You see, I am not selfish. Aren't you sorry for my lips? They have been neglected for quite three days. Aren't they pale and hungry-looking?"

He drew her tightly towards him, kissing her with long, warm kisses. Her breast heaved against his chest.

"Oh, Richard, what wonderful power you have over me!"

There was a note of fierceness in her voice. Futile fierceness. But she gave vent to the grievance of her life.

"This can't go on. No one who loves as I love can stand it. There are days when I don't see you. I must see you every day. Even if I only *see* you—I tell you what you must do," then she broke off. "Oh, if only you were in any other profession we could run away."

"My darling, there is nothing I should like more than to run away with you. But the only profession that I could belong to—in which I should not be ruined by that process—would be that of a capitalist or an actor."

"Yes, I know," she answered, her breath coming quickly. "But the fact remains that we are wasting years and years. Every day I don't see you is a year wasted. How many years do you suppose I've got to love? Think of it. I am over thirty!"

"My dear, that is young."

"For a woman," she answered, "but not for——"

"Not for what?" he asked.

"Can't you guess?"

She dropped her head and brushed his lips with her hair.

"Can't you guess?" she repeated. "A mother. We're wasting a lot of precious time. I'd give anything if it could happen now."

He lifted up her head and held her cheeks between his hands. Their eyes were lost in each other's.

"Do you really mean that?" he asked eagerly.

"I mean it, oh, I mean it," she whispered, "and think of the time that has been wasted! Think of—— It's cruel, too cruel. Look at the wicked, wicked waste. The great glory of a woman is to be a mother. Oh, I'm not proud, but I think that a son of yours and mine would be a wonderful son. He would have your genius, yes, and your looks. He would be exactly like you. He would be just as clever as you. And he would be just as great as you. For you are going to be great, Richard." Then, with a little pout, she said pleadingly: "But I should like to have him just something of me, just some little thing to remind you that he really was our son—yours and mine. Still, I don't know that anything I could give him wouldn't be a sort of defect."

"Good God, Gwen!" he cried, as he threw his arms around her. "It's a foolish confession to make, but I never worship you so much as when you're flattering me."

He could tell that she was laughing when she answered:

"But, you know, the funny thing is, Richard, that I firmly believe in all this flattery."

"I tell you what," he said, "the child is not to be a boy at all."

"Oh, nonsense," she protested, "the first child of people who are really and truly in love is always a boy. If it were a girl I should feel that you didn't really love me."

"It has got to be a girl, and it is to be all beautiful—like you. You are so beautiful. I worship your beauty. You are the only woman in the world."

"If that is so," she smiled with a tender smile of satisfaction, "you'll always be faithful. That's a very good sign, but—this is what I was going to tell you. I have

made it clear, haven't I, that I'm not going to stand this separation any longer? You're making a lot of money, and you could take a really good flat. You've *got* to take a flat somewhere near here—in Mount Street, or, perhaps, Hay Hill, and you've got to have a manservant who is devoted to you. You're always liked by servants and children and dogs. That's a certificate of character, if you like. Yes, you will have no difficulty in getting a devoted, confidential manservant, and then I shall be able to see you whenever I like, and as long as I like."

His brows drew together in a slight frown.

"I've been thinking of taking a flat—but——"

"But," she interposed, "you can afford it now."

"I can afford a first-class flat," he answered; "but I shall have to take my mother to live with me."

She stood erect, an angry gleam in her eyes.

"Oh, this is too much! You can't love me! More obstacles! Isn't your mother perfectly happy in Gloucester Terrace? You've refurnished it for her."

"At her age I can't leave her alone."

"Why can't she go and live with your sister? Why can't she go and live with Montague?" flashed Gwen. "You're the scapegoat of the family. You have to do all the unpleasant work. What does Ethel do for her? The proper place for a mother to live is with her daughter."

"The natural degeneration of a mother is into a mother-in-law," he answered. "I don't think Billy Brinstable would care for that arrangement. But you don't seem to understand that I am fond of my mother."

"And I am your mistress," she claimed.

"Of course, dear," he answered soothingly. "You know nothing in the world would delight me more than to have a flat that would be—ours. But my mother has had a hard time of it. She has had more trials and

sorrows than you know of. And she is fond of me."

"Fond of you?" asked Gwen, and there was a jeering note in her voice. "You know that she prefers her mummer son. Everybody knows that. Everybody knows that she is proud of Ethel having a house in Mayfair, and you know she goes about saying what a great grief our *liaison* is."

"Stop!" ordered Richard. "It isn't possible. Don't say such things."

Gwendolen turned away to the looking-glass. With an affectation of carelessness, she performed an unnecessary operation on her hair.

"My dear boy, it's perfectly true. Absolutely and completely true."

"It is not possible," said Richard; "it is not possible. No mother would do a thing of that sort. Who told you that she knows anything about—us?"

"My dear Richard, Bayswater is not quite Hammer-smith. They do hear of things there. Remember, I am a Bayswater girl myself. I have recovered from it."

This was really a blow to the heart for Richard. He had always done his best for his mother. He had always been devoted to her. Not only did he love her as a son, but he liked her as a friend. And to hear that she was indiscreet in her motherhood, disloyal in her friendship—if Gwendolen was right! But Gwendolen was always right. She jumped at no conclusions. She could discriminate between facts and tittle-tattle. Gravely he looked at her:

"Gwen, I'm really sorry that you told me this."

"I am your mistress," she answered. "You and I are in partnership; it is the only partnership for you and me. I have no wish to make trouble between you and your mother. I only fight for my own hand, and

my hand is yours. And I am going to fight for you."

Her eyes were flashing and her cheeks were pale.

"Remember this, Richard, that I put you on one side and the rest of the world on the other. Nothing counts, nothing matters to me but you. I'm going to keep you against anything or anybody."

Was it not well to be loved thus?

But his mother! He felt a sickening sensation of foreboding in his heart.

He knew that when Fortune comes to a man, bearing lavish gifts in one hand, she carries a drawn sword in the other.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE GREAT SORROW AND THE TOPIC

By the clock at the Marble Arch he saw that it was well after eight.

Instantly he jumped into a hansom and drove to Gloucester Terrace.

For the first time in his life he entered his home with an uneasy feeling of suspicion. He was conscious that there was a certain coldness in the kiss he pressed to his mother's forehead. With an air of resignation that, in his present state of mind, he considered unnecessary, she said:—

“You're getting later and later for dinner, Richard. I suppose before long I shall never see you at all.”

During dinner he felt in no mood to describe to her the success of the afternoon, to descant, as a day or two before he would have loved to do, on the prospects that the future held. Instead of this, he talked on trivial matters, and regarded her critically, carefully, weighing the words she spoke.

It seemed to him that she had aged. There was a lack of repose about her, a certain nervous, bird-like movement of the head.

“I saw Billy this afternoon,” he said. “He asked me to dine with him to-night. I must say he had two very peculiar friends with him.”

“Yes,” she answered, “William's friends are not very distinguished. It seems a pity that nowadays people have to mix up business with pleasure. In the

old days business men used only to see their business friends in the City. Now there is no such thing as home life."

"I myself," replied Richard, "don't see why a business friend shouldn't be a personal friend. But the two men I saw Billy with to-day are entirely undesirable in either capacity. They are ordinary City sharks. Also they are Jews. In order to do business successfully even with honest Jews one has to be a very brilliant man. To do business successfully with dishonest Jews one has to be—a dishonest Jew."

"My heart bleeds for Ethel," said his mother. "You know how refined she was, and is, of course. I can't think that she can be happy in her surroundings. Still, I had always hoped that my only daughter would live in Mayfair. After all, it is something to have a house in Mayfair."

Richard shot a keen glance at her. It seemed to him so lamentably little to have a house in Mayfair, if the home were unhappy; the geographical fact appeared scarcely worth mentioning. His mother's remark struck him as foolish. But, after all, she was an old woman. After a certain period in life the mind, as well as the body, deteriorates. After a certain period the wisdom of old age is very much akin to the inexperience of youth.

"Do you know anything about William's business?—how he is getting on?"

He had heard sinister rumours. But he had no wish to cause her anxiety.

"He never sends me any briefs," was his answer.

"I'm afraid, Richard, you only think about yourself."

He opened wide eyes of astonishment.

"I suppose if William considered you were the best

man to employ for his sort of work, he would employ you, wouldn't he?"

"There are two opinions," he replied, "about everything—even about barristers."

He was genuinely surprised at the suggestion of selfishness.

"I think you ought, if only for your sister's sake, to find out something more definite about William. But I suppose you are too engrossed in your own affairs."

A thrill of pain shot to his heart. By the light of Gwendolen's statement he saw through a long vista of conversations that he had held with his mother. So confident had he been of his love for her that it had never occurred to him that she did not regard him with anything but the warmest affection. True, he had always known that Montague was her favourite son. "How?" he asked himself, "could he, a barrister, a man with an alert brain, have been blind all this time?" And then he recollected the fact that barristers almost automatically shake off in private life those arts of observation and deduction which they so strenuously exercise in their hours of labour. The expression "only daughter" which she had just used would, a day or two before, have seemed to him insignificant, but, with the suspicion that he now felt, it struck him as a slur upon himself.

Then she turned the conversation to Montague. How cruel the critics were to him! How unthinking the attitude of the public! Montague was the greatest actor there had ever been, and yet the critics found absurd faults with him. Why had he not been knighted? Why did the public refuse to patronise certain plays in which he acted with such marvellous skill?

The answer to these questions Richard knew; but he didn't think it prudent to give them.

"I should dearly love to see my eldest son knighted," she concluded.

There was a certain touch of scorn about his lips as he asked:

"Would it annoy you very much if your second son were knighted?"

To his surprise she treated the question as a joke.

"There's not much chance of that," she laughed.

"Why, I don't know," he replied quite gravely, "Attorney-Generals are knighted: Solicitor-Generals are knighted: Judges are compelled to be knighted."

"Surely, Richard, you don't imagine for one moment that you can ever be made a judge?"

"One's prophecies about oneself are always ridiculous—except to oneself, and perhaps to one's mother," and he could not forbear to add, "and to the woman one loves."

Her lips shut tight as she answered:

"Ah, that's it." She shrugged her shoulders. "That's the obstacle. I was talking to Mrs. Bolitho, and you know that her husband is a solicitor. Well, I was telling her what a great grief it was to me."

There was a cold look in his eyes as he asked slowly:

"What was a great grief to you?"

"Why, about you and Mrs. Ainslie."

"Good God!" he exclaimed under his breath, "then it is true."

"What did you say?" she asked.

"I said nothing, nothing. I was only thinking."

"And," she continued, "Mrs. Bolitho entirely agreed with me. She said what a pity it was that you were quite throwing yourself away. That you could never reach a really good position, that her husband would like to give you work, but that he could never trust a man who was

tied to the apron-strings of—that sort of woman.”

Without looking at her he answered slowly, grimly:

“Mrs. Ainslie does not wear aprons. Mrs. Ainslie is not ‘that sort of woman.’ I know the expression means an insult, and that’s all I know about it.”

“That’s neither here nor there,” replied his mother.

“But everybody says the same thing about you and Mrs. Ainslie.”

“Everybody that you—talk to about it?”

“Yes, and it’s not fair to Montague. I shouldn’t be at all surprised if one of the reasons why he hasn’t got his knighthood is owing to your behaviour.”

Good heavens! His brain reeled. He had heard many conversations among the Bayswater matrons. He knew the extremely parochial views with which they looked on the life of their suburb; how they judged the world from the bargain-counter at Whiteley’s. It might well be that his mother’s old age, assisted by the stultifying process of her friends’ companionship, was weakening her intellect. He knew that in Bayswater sub-society matrons who had not the good fortune to be suffering from obscure bodily ailments would actually bring into the conversational forum the delinquencies of their own sons. What his mother’s companions thought of him mattered not one tittle. But it seemed extraordinary to him that she should show such appalling mental, and, indeed, moral deterioration.

“Mother,” he said, “I am going to take a flat somewhere in Mayfair. I can easily afford it now; and I want you to come and live with me. I am making progress, and it would be much more convenient for me to live in a more central position. Besides, it would effect a saving of the money I allow you.”

She pursed up her lips. Her cheeks flushed as though they had received a blow.

"No, thank you," she answered. "I quite understand what that means. Mrs. Ainslie lives in Mayfair."

His tolerance was at an end.

"That will do," he answered.

He rose from the table and walked to the door.

With his hand on the knob he turned to her.

"I am now going to telephone to Mrs. Ainslie. If she is in, I'm going to Green Street."

She glared indignantly at him.

"Richard, you are the great sorrow of my life."

"No," he answered, "I am your great topic of conversation."

Then he closed the door.

CHAPTER XXV

THE POSITION OF BILLY

DURING the rest of that term Richard prospered amazingly.

Even John was more than satisfied. He could not, however, regard Mrs. Ainslie as other than a disturbing possibility. Nothing, however, had occurred to increase his deep-seated disapproval of the *liaison*.

Richard had taken a flat in Hay Hill, the decoration of which he had left entirely to Gwendolen, much to her delight. Though he had no particular appreciation of beautiful things, he had an instinctive dislike for the ugly, a fact which gave her no slight pleasure. She understood that his whole artistic appreciation was centred on her. In his eyes she was the concentration of beauty.

Until the flat had been completely decorated and furnished, he had not set a foot in it, and, on its completion, she had shown it to him with pride.

He had pronounced it "all right." This faint praise, after all the trouble she had taken, might have been galling, but for her complete understanding of his temperament.

"If you like it," he added, "if it's good enough for you to come here, that's all I want. It is more, far more than I deserve."

Now that he was in possession of the flat there was no longer any necessity for mysterious visits to "Brighton" or—elsewhere. At any moment John could communicate with him by telephone.

Thus the clerk, while heartily disapproving of the whole affair, was more or less lulled into acquiescence.

After the unfortunate episode with his mother Richard saw little of her, and—in a measure—this estrangement influenced his relations with his sister. He felt that his family did not appreciate him, that they did not require him. He had done his best for his mother, and he had done his best for Ethel. And there was an end to the matter. In addition, there lurked in his mind a sinister foreboding with regard to his sister. Of whatever disaster that foreboding might be the precursor, he knew that he would be powerless to prevent it. Billy must remain the master of the situation. Billy had decided upon what lines he should conduct his business. If the business prospered, so much the better. If the business failed, so much the worse.

Richard, indeed, had little faith in the methods of his brother-in-law; but he, himself, was powerless to interfere. At times disquieting rumours reached him. He heard that Billy was mixed up in transactions which, if not exactly shady, could scarcely be called highly reputable.

On the rare occasions when he saw Ethel he gave her every opportunity of telling him anything that was on her mind. But she never complained either of her husband or her husband's friends. Therefore, almost against his better judgment, he was persuaded into believing that all was well, but well in a way with which he had no sympathy.

At Christmas-time Gwen and he and Wilfred went to Monte Carlo, in spite of the protests of the unfortunate husband.

"Absolutely absurd," he said over and over again, "to go to Monte Carlo at this time of the year! I can't

possibly come back until May. I know perfectly well that when my system has got accustomed to the climate of the South, if I return either in February, March or April, I shall probably catch bronchitis and die. It is sheer foolhardiness for me to go," and so forth and so on.

Gwendolen, however, over-persuaded him.

"You can stay out there, my dear, as long as you like. But, of course, Richard must be back for the opening of the Courts in January."

They spent a delightful time at the Hôtel de Paris. But on the ninth of January Richard had to return.

Two days before his departure the three of them were sitting at tea in the Gallery in front of Ciro's. Gwendolen and Richard seemed depressed, Wilfred peevish and irritable. Suddenly he snapped out at his wife.

"Why don't you go home with Richard?"

Her eyes stared blankly at him. "Why—don't I go home with Richard?"

Was he speaking sarcasm or sense? she wondered.

"Why," she added, "because I am staying here with you."

He crossed his legs petulantly, kicking at a chair.

"I can't stand being alone with you, and you know it. You always rub me the wrong way when we're alone together."

"My dear Wilfred."

His tongue clicked on the roof of his mouth.

"Oh, you do—you know you do. I'm not well enough to be annoyed. I ought never to be irritated. There's nothing worse for me than to be irritated."

It was obvious to her that he really wished her to go back to London.

Curious though it was, it seemed too good to be true.

Then Wilfred turned as though to attack Richard:

"I suppose it would be asking too much of you to look after her on the way back? Two hundred trunks—and a maid worse than useless."

Richard, overjoyed, concealed his delight.

"My dear Wilfred——"

Instantly Wilfred interrupted:

"There you are!" he said to Gwendolen. "Just as I told you. He won't be bothered with you. No one will be bothered with you."

"Wilfred, I don't know what's the matter with *you*."

"Everything is the matter with *me*. No one sympathises with *me*."

"But," interjected Richard, "I was on the point of saying that I should be only too pleased to look after your wife. Anything that I can do for—your wife will be a great pleasure to me."

"You only say that out of politeness."

"My dear Wilfred, I assure you——"

Wilfred jumped up.

"Then I take you at your word! I take you at your word, mind you! Off you go the day after to-morrow. And I will go now myself and arrange for the seats in the Côte d'Azure."

And the extraordinary man bustled off.

Instinctively Richard pressed her hand under the table-cloth.

"What a husband!" he said.

"*Mon Dieu!*" she murmured. "*Il a la tête, a ça*. We'll stay a night in Paris, won't we, dear? We've never been alone in Paris—you and I together!"

"Where shall we stay?"

"I know a little hotel, a quiet little hotel in the Rue Helder. We shall be absolutely unknown. Oh, darling, what a stroke of luck! and the charm of crossing on the

boat alone—together. It will be like coming back from our honeymoon!”

He speculated:

“I wonder if there’s another man in the world like Wilfred! Do you think it’s possible that he’s setting a trap for us?”

Her laughter rippled.

“Good heavens, no!”

The Hilary Term began splendidly. Never had the table in his chambers presented such a delightful spectacle as it did on the first day of the term. It was covered with huge stacks of papers, and on the front page of each was marked a large fee.

By the side of the table stood John, beaming with pride.

He told Richard that he had taken a set of chambers in Westminster which would be ready for occupation before Parliament sat. They were not expensive, and, beyond doubt, they would prove a prudent speculation.

“There is one thing I want to ask you, sir,” said John. “You see you are coming in for a large Parliamentary practice. If ever you should think of going into Parliament you will, of course, have to sacrifice it. It would seem a very great loss of your income to you and—me. Of course, if you don’t go into Parliament, sir, you have no chance of ever being Solicitor-General or Attorney-General, or even of getting a judgeship. I should like to know if you have any idea of going into Parliament.”

Richard did not immediately reply. He had long realised that the time would come when it would be necessary for him to decide whether he would prefer a colossal income at the Parliamentary Bar and no prospects, except financial prospects, or a semi-Parliamentary

career with a view to becoming a law officer or a judge.

"It will be time enough to decide that, John, when I've taken silk."

"Well, sir, I've been thinking a great deal about that, and—things being as they are, and we getting the fees we do—I don't think the moment has yet come for you to take silk. But should any of the leading K.C.'s at the Parliamentary Bar or on the Common Law side die, or should anything happen to them, you might be compelled to apply to the Chancellor at once. It is the most important thing in the world to know the precise moment to take silk."

Richard smiled.

"And you, of all men, John, are the most likely to know the exact moment."

The clerk's mouth slid from side to side with pleasure.

"I thank you, sir, and I'm quite sure that you will act on my judgment."

"I always act on your judgment."

"Thank you, sir, I'm very pleased to hear it. Oh, there's one other matter, sir. A brief came down from Venables, Hampton and Brinstable."

"Yes?" He looked up sharply.

"Well, sir, I sent it back."

"Wasn't the fee good enough?"

"The figures were good enough, sir, but——"

"Well?"

"I wouldn't guarantee that we should ever get the money, sir."

"What the devil do you mean? My brother-in-law is in the firm."

"I know that, sir," answered John. "And their clerk made a bit of fuss on that account. But I said, brother-in-law or no brother-in-law, we don't mix up

family matters with finance. Those were my words, sir."

"What sort of a case was it?"

"It was a commercial case, sir. As far as I could make out, Venables, Hampton, and Brinstable took a sort of personal interest. I think they acted for the plaintiffs."

Richard remained thoughtful.

"What is the reputation of this firm in the Temple?"

John rubbed a thumb along his fat chin.

"They're hard to get money from."

"Yes, but that's true of a great many firms. A large number of the best firms pride themselves on paying their office expenses out of the interest on the money they have received for counsels' fees."

"Yes, sir," explained John, "that's just it. The best firms can do that—and you know that the money is safe, Your principal is safe, and they collar the interest. I don't say it's a right thing to do. But you can't quarrel with—the best firms. They can make their own terms with most people. In a year's time they won't be able to make their own terms with us. But when a firm like Venables, Hampton and Brinstable don't pay counsels' fees pretty prompt, all barristers' clerks fight shy of 'em. I've seen lots of no-cure no-pay men appearing in court for Venables, Hampton and Brinstable."

"Is it as bad as that?"

John nodded.

At that moment the junior clerk came in:

"Mr. Brinstable wishes to speak to you on the telephone, sir. Can you speak to him?"

"All right. Put him through to me."

"Yes, yes. I am Richard. . . . No, I don't think it's at all probable that my clerk was in any way insulting to

your clerk. . . . He had absolute authority to refuse briefs. . . . Yes, yes, the fee was enough. He refused it"—and here Richard looked at John—"because I'm too busy. . . . Oh, you think that is not the real reason." . . . Richard's eyes flashed. "If you are impertinent I shall ring off. . . . Yes, I daresay you *are* worried. But that's no excuse. If you want to know, I have heard that some of your cases have been conducted by no-cure no-pay men. I can't afford to earn that sort of reputation myself. . . . I would certainly be willing to do you a favour. But I can't afford to do anybody a favour at the expense of my reputation." . . . His eyes glittered angrily. The hand that was holding the receiver clenched tight. "That settles it." Immediately he rang off and turned to John:

"Under no circumstances whatever will you take any briefs from the firm of Venables, Hampton and Brinstable."

"Not even if they bring a cheque, sir?"

"Not even if they bring cash!"

"I think you're quite right, sir."

"That will do."

CHAPTER XXVI

THE ATTITUDE OF LADY MEYVILLE

THE result of this conversation was a complete estrangement between the brothers-in-law. Occasionally Richard saw Ethel by appointment at his flat. She never complained. She tried to effect a reconciliation between him and her husband. But Richard declined.

"This is not your quarrel, Ethel," he said one Sunday afternoon when she came to see him. "You have nothing to do with it. Ever since I met him I've had great difficulty in tolerating him. After what he said to me on the telephone I find it impossible to tolerate him. That is the end of the matter."

Suddenly she burst into tears.

"Dick, Dick, I'm afraid, I'm afraid. I feel as if something terrible is going to happen. Oh, Richard, you understand things. Don't you see that something terrible is hanging over my head?"

White-faced and trembling she looked at him. Her eyes had grown larger, and terror stared out from their depths.

"My dear," he said, trying to reassure her, "what can you mean? What can possibly be hanging over your head?"

"I don't know," and again she shuddered. "But I know that there's a great deal going on that I don't understand—Billy has changed. He is afraid of something, too."

"My dear girl," he answered, "believe me that, if I

thought I could do anything for Billy, I would, in spite of what has happened."

Slowly she spoke:

"Richard, I don't believe he would let you. He hates you. Your success is maddening to him. You know that when you were struggling he never sent you a brief. He never wanted you to succeed. I know I ought not to give my husband away like this. But, Richard, what can I do? I am the most miserable woman in the world."

"My dear Ethel," he said, and he put his hands firmly on her shoulders. "I'm doing very well for myself now. I'm making money—a good deal of it. It is very unlikely—I'm afraid—that I shall ever marry, and if I do marry I shall marry a very rich woman. So you will always be provided for. If Billy's affairs go to the devil, I will give you an allowance. If you are fond of Billy, you can give him some of it. If you're not fond of Billy, you can separate from him. So, if the worst comes to the worst, you need not worry, old girl."

She stared vaguely about the room, anguish drawing her eyebrows together in a point. She seemed to be about to speak again: to tell him something or to ask him something. But instead of that she buried her head in a paroxysm of weeping.

Suddenly Richard was seized with an idea.

"Mother must come and stay with you. Hasn't she suggested it?"

Through the sobs the words came:

"No; I suggested it."

"And she refused!" exclaimed Richard in surprise.

"Well, you know, mother is getting old. She is not as strong as she was. I don't think she is quite as well-balanced as she used to be, and she is simply insane about

Montague. She spends most of her time at the theatre. She reads plays for him there. And, in a month, he is putting up a piece that he accepted on her advice!"

His jaw dropped in astonishment. "It is a curious thing how suddenly a woman becomes infirm. After fifty-eight she nearly always degenerates either mentally or physically in a fortnight."

"Dick, Dick," said Ethel, with a sad note in her voice. "You know I sometimes think it is all my fault. After our engagement the change began. But I should just love to have her with me. I shall be so afraid. It will all be so strange and so cold."

Again she shuddered.

"I don't think I shall ever get through it."

Then her wild eyes went to the ceiling:

"And what will he be doing all the time? I shall be so anxious about him. Oh, if I could only see the future six months ahead!"

She sat erect, with tightly clenched hands. Then she walked slowly, heavily, laboriously to the door.

As her four-wheeler drove away, he hailed a hansom and drove to Gloucester Terrace. There he found his mother surrounded by designs for theatrical costumes, and taking no little pride in the fact that Montague had consulted her on the subject.

Instantly he dominated the situation. He told her that she must stay with Ethel. She talked about the first night of the play. But he would have none of it.

At last, seeing that common sense had ceased to appeal to her, he stated deliberately, even brutally:

"Either you go to stay with Ethel or you don't. If you don't, I stop your allowance."

Instantly her whole frame was a mass of quivering nerves.

"Stop my allowance! You dare not! Oh, no, you dare not! A son who stops his mother's allowance is——" But suddenly her mood changed. "A fig for you and your allowance! I'm going to make money. I'm going to make a great deal of money."

Good heavens! Had this crazy little woman been embarking on speculation at her time of life?

"Mother," he said in terror, "you don't mean to say that you are speculating without consulting me?"

Her eyes flashed with indignation.

"Consulting my ungrateful son! I should think not, indeed."

"Are you speculating?"

"Never you mind. You've no respect for your mother. You never had any regard for the family. Even Montague says that you are 'ashamed of the family.'"

"Montague says that?" exclaimed Richard, bewildered.

"Montague says that," she repeated triumphantly. "Mrs. Pegram says that. Mrs. Bolitho says that. Everybody says that."

Quietly he answered, "Yes, yes, I suppose they agree with what you tell them. I'm very sorry, mother."

But she would not listen to him. She worked herself into a passion of rage. Accusations against himself for meanness, ingratitude, immorality, and other faults were showered upon him. The scene was too painful to be bearable.

"What could be the cause of it?" he asked himself.

There was a new burden of care on his shoulders as he left the house.

He went back to the Temple and worked far into the night.

On returning to Hay Hill he slept the sleep of a tired man.

CHAPTER XXVII

IN THE DIVORCE COURT

IN the early weeks of the Hilary term every moment of Richard's time was occupied. Often he arrived at the Temple at nine o'clock, and it was not an unusual thing for him to leave his chambers at midnight. If not actually engaged in work, he found that his brain engrossed itself entirely with details of his various cases. In no sense was it callousness that excluded his family from his thoughts. He felt, however, and he felt very bitterly, his powerlessness to help Ethel.

Day by day he hoped that his mother or his sister, or even Billy, would give him some information as to what was happening in Tilney Street. But neither made a move. He consoled himself with the consciousness that he had done his best, that he had advised the safest course; more than that he could not do. He had in his mind, often at the same time, the interests of a dozen litigants. Even Mrs. Ainslie occupied a secondary position. If she had not constantly telephoned to him—much to the disgust of John—it is possible that she might have slipped out of his mind. For his mind was so occupied that it absolutely disregarded the claims of his heart.

But when he saw her the power of his heart swept away all things.

He loved her at these moments more passionately, more violently, than before.

And she, in her knowledge of his character, concentrated in these moments the enthusiasm of days of neglect.

She became apparently reconciled to the altered conditions which his success had imposed upon him and her.

One morning at ten o'clock he was at Essex Court engrossed in his notes on a *cause célèbre*—the case of *Cummidge v. Cummidge and Brostell*. He, with a junior who practised regularly in the Divorce Court, had been briefed for the petitioner. The respondent and co-respondent were represented by eminent K.C.'s. The case, which had been going on for two days, had attracted a vast amount of public interest.

His client, a man of strange and unsympathetic tastes, had incurred a considerable amount of odium. Richard's task was a difficult one. Everything depended upon his cross-examination of a singularly pretty and innocent-looking woman. On the previous day she had gone through her examination in chief. When the court sat that morning it would be Richard's entirely unpleasant task to cross-examine her. His own sympathies were not with his own client. He was sorry for the little woman, and did not believe in her guilt. But in his mind he was devising subtle pitfalls to entrap her when John entered.

"Can you see Mr. Barnard Abrahams?"

"Who the devil is Barnard Abrahams? I can't see anybody now."

"Excuse me, sir, but Mr. Barnard Abrahams is a partner in Abrahams, Noseworthy and Abrahams. I think it would be well," he said confidently, "for you to see him."

Richard made a movement suggestive of irritation.

"I can't see anybody now—all right; show him in."

He felt a feeling almost of satisfaction in brushing aside his notes intended to involve the ruin of a woman who had suffered much.

Mr. Barnard Abrahams, a stout, respectable Jew,

a member of one of the most important and the most honourable Anglo-Asiatic firms in London, entered.

"Mr. Meyville," he said, "I was walking down to the City, and, knowing that you were an early man, I thought you would be willing to waive ceremony and let me speak to you on an important matter."

Richard nodded assent.

"Certainly, Mr. Abrahams; but I have only a few minutes to spare. I have to be in court——" He took out his watch and clicked the cover.

In verbal shorthand the eminent solicitor explained the case. A certain woman of the name of Gabrielle Lévi, a French Jewess, had been committed for trial at the Old Bailey. The case would come on at the next session. By profession she was a pirate of the streets. The man who lived on her earnings, an Englishman of evil repute, a resident in the neighbourhood of Leicester Square, had been killed by her. Would Richard undertake the defence?

Frankly he answered that he would not.

"It might be possible, Mr. Abrahams, to reduce the offence to manslaughter. I happen to have seen an account of the police court proceedings. The woman hit the man on the head with a hatchet. Previously she had threatened him. Technically it is murder. It would, I dare say, be possible to reduce it to manslaughter. But I don't care for the case."

Mr. Abrahams bent forward earnestly.

"I think you can secure an acquittal. That's what we want—an acquittal."

"Oh, my dear sir, out of the question."

"I put it to you," said Mr. Abrahams, drawing his chair nearer, "as a possibility. I don't think anybody else *could* get the woman off. But I think you *could*."

Richard waived aside the expression of opinion, which he believed to be merely fulsome flattery.

But the other persisted.

“So far you have got the reputation of always being on the right side. A barrister in your position is like a jockey who is lucky in his mounts. Believe me, sir, that jurors at the Old Bailey are very much influenced by the counsel that are retained; far more than the jurors of the King’s Bench. Besides, nowadays an enormous amount of a criminal trial is conducted in the newspapers. As you know—we—have the controlling interest in a great many journals. Although it is contempt of court to say anything prejudicial to a prisoner, it is very easy indeed to put a vast amount of paragraphs in the prisoner’s favour. I think,” he spoke slowly, and he spoke with an intention not expressed by the actual words he used, “I think you would find it to your advantage—in a great many ways—to conduct the case and to secure an acquittal.”

Richard looked at Mr. Abrahams. He remembered the vast efforts employed always by the Jewish community to rescue from the toils of the law any member of the Ancient Faith. He recollected the case of Lipski, when the Jews moved heaven and earth to bring about the respite of that murderer’s sentence, even while the Home Secretary was walking about with the man’s confession in his pocket. To his mind there occurred the case of a Hebrew financier accused of fraudulent financial dealings, and the herculean labours on the part of the Jews. In his mind he weighed the desirability of offending or obliging this vast organisation. Was he strong enough, he wondered.

Then Mr. Abrahams made a false move.

“We will give you any fee you like.”

"That is a subject," he answered, "for the consideration of my clerk—not for me. As a matter of fact, I don't want to appear in the case."

This was dismissal.

Mr. Abrahams rose.

"Perhaps, Mr. Meyville, you will allow me to fix up a consultation with you on the matter for this afternoon. May I speak to your clerk about it? I should like to bring with me one or two members of the Anglo-Alien Purity Protection Society. They have taken a great interest in the woman. And I daresay they will be able to throw some light on the case which might induce you to interest yourself in this unfortunate. Mind you, it binds you to nothing."

It was now a quarter past ten. There were only a few minutes before it would be necessary for him to go into court.

"All right," he answered. "Settle the appointment with my clerk. But I don't think it will be any use."

Hastily he ran through his notes, and then rushed over to the robing-room.

The court was waiting when he entered, breathless.

Immediately on his legs, he began the cross-examination of Mrs. Cummidge. A delicate little woman with a china-white face and large, innocent blue eyes, she stared almost sweetly at him. He was so handsome, so courteous, that she could scarcely believe that it was his duty with a strong, cruel hand to tear out the secrets of her heart.

He spoke to her as a friend, almost as an admirer.

To the thinking of this innocent little woman he was more like a kindly and expert surgeon than a hired enemy, subsidised—at a huge price—to do her the most terrible wrong.

He showed her letters, asked if she had written them; received her admissions as though applauding them. He asked her questions as to her meetings with "Duggie" Brostell, and fixed with consummate care the dates of certain events. So delicately, indeed, did he put his questions that even in open court, in the eyes of greedily curious men and cynical, unsexed women, she scarcely felt any indelicacy in revealing the most intimate details of her life.

Suddenly he put a sort of consolidated question:

"You have called this person such and such names in your letters; you have said such and such things about yourself in your letters. He has called you this and that in his letters. He has called himself by various pet names in his letters. You have seen him alone at this place and that place for so many hours at a time. Do you deny?"—now his words came fiercely—"that you were his mistress?"

A curious smile played about the effeminate face of the curly, golden-haired, over-dressed little co-respondent.

If the judge of the Divorce Court had any knowledge of life outside of the Divorce Court, that smile would have convinced him of the woman's innocence, so effeminate and cynical and vile was it. It was a smile of ill-favoured, unearned pride.

The poor woman in the witness-box saw that smile. It struck horror into her heart.

Indignantly she answered: "Never."

Contemptuously Richard's lips curled as he looked down at the effeminate mannikin in front of him. Theatrically, he recognised in an instant that the expression of his lips should not be wasted.

Without relaxing a nerve, he turned on the witness.

The look on that handsome, just man's face brought her defence tripping to her lips.

"Why, he was more like a girl friend than anything else!"

"That is your answer," said Richard sternly. "That is what you ask the gentlemen of the jury to believe."

Instantly the frightened woman in the witness-box felt conscious of her peril. From the mouth of the kindly counsel with the silver tongue had suddenly shot the fangs of a snake.

Shivering with fear, she felt that the struggle was at an end. She had no further strength. Like a white rabbit fascinated by a huge python, she looked for a few seconds into Richard's face, heedless of her own counsel, who was preparing to re-examine her. Then her self-possession left her. She trembled from head to foot. Powerless to control herself, she burst into a paroxysm of weeping. Otherwise there was a complete silence in the Court, except for the drawing of breath indicative that someone had done a monstrous thing.

Richard heard a half-stifled "Oh!" in a woman's voice.

He turned round.

Three rows behind him he saw Gwen.

Instantly he scribbled a note, turned to a briefless junior behind him, and said:

"Pass that to the lady in the big black hat."

Gwen shot a glance almost of indignant hatred at him. It fell harmless against the two tails of his wig. She was in arms for her sex. She read the note, and her eyes shot back "I won't."

He had asked her to leave the court.

The body of the woman in the witness-box continued to heave with sharp shudders.

Richard saw that a further advantage could be gained.

"I beg your lordship's pardon," he said, "but when the witness has composed herself I have one or two——"

At these words from the now hateful voice, the woman's white, tear-stained face raised itself over the rail of the box in sheer cold fear.

"I have two or three more very important questions to ask this witness." He gave every word its maximum of weight. "Of course, my lord, I am anxious that the lady should have every opportunity to compose herself. Indeed, I should not like to put these questions to the witness—until she is completely restored."

A wave of terror passed over the wan, quivering face. What could he ask now? What could be worse than what had happened? She felt that she was utterly disgraced already. Almost in an instant she had been dragged from a pinnacle of innocence and plunged into a morass of guilt. After the evidence of the letters, with the evidence of the meetings, what judge and jury could believe her innocent? It was futile to continue the fight.

The Mephistopheles in wig and gown had by some forensic trickery prepared more crushing blows. Why should she wait for further dishonour? He had broken her heart. He had ruined her life. That must be the end.

A wild, appealing glance shot from her eyes to her counsel, a kindly K. C., who, in spite of the fact that he had spent the greater portion of his life in the Divorce Court, did not outside its walls divide all humanity into possible petitioners, respondents, and co-respondents.

By the light of his brief he firmly believed his client guilty.

In him there was no help: his face was barren of comfort.

Courage came to the little woman, the courage that comes to all creatures in the moment of death. Her voice was only just audible.

"My lord—I won't—I can't answer any more questions."

The judge gravely, and yet almost tenderly, addressed her:

"I don't know whether you quite understand what that means?"

Her eyes, wide-open, innocent eyes, stared up at him.

"I am afraid I do, my lord. But I can't go on. I can't bear it any longer."

She knew that the jury did not move in the society of persons of the "Duggie" type, and would never understand the relation in which they stood to women.

"What do you say, Mr. Indermere?" said the judge, turning to her counsel.

There was no help for it. Mr. Indermere could do nothing in the matter.

The perfumed "Duggie," a pink flush of pride on either cheek as he brushed the powder from his eyelashes, communicated with his counsel. A few minutes' wrangling, and a *decree nisi* was pronounced.

John tapped Richard on the shoulder, and hurried him into another court.

A vulgarian, with a pimple-studded face and a thick moustache, laughed to a friend:

"I'm damned glad that I've got rid of that damned woman. Come and have a bottle, my boy." The petitioner was in fine fettle.

The golden-haired youth went out of the court with a winsome, proud, and wobbly walk.

"Women always give one away," he said in a shrill voice to his counsel.

In the box, her head buried in her hands, the innocent woman sobbed her soul out until the usher gently led her away.

Gwendolen drove home to Green Street, well-nigh hating Richard in her heart.

Until four o'clock that afternoon Richard, in Court 7, K.B.D., gave no thought to anything save and except the manner in which iron ore was shipped at Bilbao to the English consumers at Newcastle.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE PROPOSED PROSECUTION OF "A. B."

THREE times between four and five did Gwendolen telephone to the Temple. On each occasion John told her that Richard was engaged at a conference or a consultation.

She had begun to dislike John.

At five o'clock Mr. Abrahams appeared by appointment.

With him were two members of the Anglo-Alien Purity Protection Society. As such they were introduced by the solicitor.

Richard, looking up from the papers on his table, saw with surprise that one was the manager of the St. Alphonse Hotel.

Amusement concealed his annoyance. Astonishment at the far-reaching freemasonry of aliens in England succeeded. He was completely in their hands. He did not trouble the Committee to state their reasons for inducing him to defend Gabrielle Lévi. He undertook her defence.

With a touch of sarcasm, directed at the manager of the St. Alphonse, as they were leaving the room, he said:

"I am sure that not only Anglo-Alien, but English purity is safe in your hands."

Shortly after their departure Jack Nicholl, the tall, keen-faced Treasury counsel, whose chambers were above Richard's, came briskly in.

This eloquent, gaunt man, with a huge nose and a

drawn, ascetic face, one of the most popular men at the Bar, and certainly, in spite of his sinister appearance, one of the most kind-hearted, held papers in his hand.

"My dear Dick," he said, "I'm awfully busy just now. I shall be working upstairs till late to-night on other things. Would you mind looking through these papers for me? That there ought to be a conviction I'm convinced. It would succeed. But I haven't actually had time to look carefully at the papers. If, by any chance, you see a flaw anywhere, let me know, will you? Of course, you're a busy man, too, but I shall be very much obliged if you will do me this favour."

"My dear Jack, have you ever come across anybody yet who was not anxious to do you a favour?"

"Oh, yes," he smiled. "I've often thought, when leaving the Old Bailey, that some prisoners' friends were on the point of breaking my head."

He put the papers on the table.

"It's the usual affair—solicitor—embezzlement—you know. If it's all right, we shall apply for a warrant to-morrow morning."

And he strode out.

Richard readily put aside his own work in order to accede to the kindly man's request. Often and often had Nicholl done him a good turn, given him advice, and, what was more to him at one time, encouragement. And it pleased him immensely to do him this slight service.

He turned to the papers.

On the outside sheet was:

IN THE MATTER OF THE PROPOSED PROSECUTION
OF "A.B."

He undid the tape.

The solicitor, "A.B.," whoever he was, had clearly embezzled trust moneys. "A.B.," whoever he was,

apparently lived beyond his means. The story was almost common form.

"Damn it," said Richard to himself, "these solicitors are getting worse and worse. Before long, the whole lot of them will be in jail."

He became indignant with "A.B.," whoever he was. Nothing could exceed the absolute baseness of his proceedings. In the nature of things, the widow, the friendless, the defenceless, all those, in fact, who are common objects of sympathy and respect by other professions, are the orthodox prey for the cupidity of the solicitor.

Suddenly his pencil dropped. Beads of perspiration came out on his forehead. He took his thumb and drew it along a line of the typewritten brief as though to verify it, as though to convince himself that what he saw there was actually written and not a fiction of his brain. And yet there were the letters. There was the date.

The thing was unmistakable.

"Terrible! Terrible!" he murmured, as he rose from the table and walked with his head bent, up and down the room. Three times—four times—he paced up and down, and then stared into the glass with unseeing eyes. He rattled his keys and his money in his pocket, and then, a limp, hopeless man, threw himself into an arm-chair.

He stared straight before him. After five minutes he rose suddenly from the chair, walked back to the table, and looked fixedly at the brief.

"Married on the 29th. of July last year."

There it was. There was the clue.

"A.B." was Billy Brinstable.

There could be no doubt about it.

Without reading to the end of the brief he began it again.

With every nerve of his alert brain he sought a loophole.

He reached the last page and dropped the papers with limp hands. "Seven years."

Then he rose again and paced the room.

"Seven years, that's what he'll get, and no power on earth can stop it. Good God! And my sister, and the child!"

The door opened, and John entered.

"Can you speak to Mrs. Ainslie on the telephone?"

He roared, "Ainslie! Confound it, no! I can't speak to anybody."

The door closed.

For several minutes he could say nothing to himself but "Seven years! Seven years!"

Suddenly he seized the papers, tied them up with the tape, and rushed up to Nicholl's room. Imperatively he flung the brief on the gaunt man's table.

"You've read 'em?" he asked.

"Yes, I've read 'em. It's a dead case, isn't it?"

"Dead. What do you think he'll get?"

"It's a bad case. Besides, the prosecutor, a man called Wagstaffe, is very bitter. He's a rich man with a pretty wife—a Jewess, I think. I imagine there's something behind all this—something to do with the wife."

Richard, at the word "Wagstaffe," put his hand to his forehead, searching to locate that unusual name somewhere in his memory. Suddenly he fixed it. The pretty little Jewess with the flaxen hair whom he had seen, a sorrowful spectator at Billy's wedding, was a Mrs. Wagstaffe.

Now he understood.

"What do you think he'll get?" he repeated.

"Well, as a matter of fact," answered Jack, "I think it's rather a vindictive prosecution. I should say ten years."

"Good heavens!"

The alert eyes of the Treasury counsel looked up at him:

"Do you know the man?"

"Jack," he said, and his voice shook as he stood with the electric light full on his face, 'A.B.' is my brother-in-law."

"The devil!" exclaimed Nicholl, rising to his full height. "My dear chap, I'm. . . ."

Though the words of sympathy failed him, yet there was sincere sympathy in his voice. Though he spent his entire life in an atmosphere of crime, in an atmosphere of sorrow, of panic, and of fear, there were many moments when his heart bled for the monstrous criminals that he sent to their long home. In his vast experience it had often been necessary for him to defend personal friends, sometimes sons of personal friends—soul-shattering experiences, these.

"And you say, Jack, that you think it's a vindictive prosecution? You'll do your best, won't you? You'll do your best to let him down—lightly?"

Firmly, the other answered:

"I shall retire from the case. My dear Dick, you're a friend of mine. I can't possibly prosecute your brother-in-law."

With a long, thin hand he stroked his forehead as he added:

"There are moments when our profession is too—hideous."

"But I ask you to. It's much better that you should. It's much better that you should do it than anybody

else. You could—well, you could minimise—the thing.”

“No!” Nicholl replied. “You see it’s sure to leak out that he’s a relative of yours. Thank God, we’ve got some *esprit de corps* at the Bar. Somebody else must do it. Whoever it is—will do what he can. The judge will probably let him down lightly—as lightly as possible.”

“What do you mean by lightly? What do you mean by that?”

“Well, I’m afraid that in the present state of public opinion it can’t be less than seven years. I’m awfully sorry. A good chap, was he?”

The past tense sounded horrible to Richard.

“No,” he answered grimly, “he’s not. But it’s hell for my sister—and there are other things.”

Nicholl took his hand and shook it firmly.

Neither spoke.

The grip of that gaunt man’s hand, the hand of a man whom he considered great, not only as a Criminal Court counsel, but great as a human being, brought tears to his eyes as he closed the door.

For nearly an hour he remained in his room wrapped in thought. Then he told John that he could leave.

Silence settled down upon the Temple. An occasional footfall sounded on the flagstones of Essex Court. London throbbed and murmured in the distance. Heedless of the time, he sat on. Now and again he would rise and pace the room, his hand gripping his chin.

Suddenly he went to the telephone. There were no tones in his voice as he spoke.

“Is that you, Billy? . . . I’m Richard. . . . Never mind about that. This is a matter of life and death. . . . What’s that? . . . You dropped the receiver? Listen. Answer my questions, and do precisely as I tell you. . . .

Pull yourself together and listen. Where's Ethel? . . . Is there anybody with her in the house? A nurse and the doctor are there? . . . Go out, yourself, taking with you your latchkey in an envelope addressed to me at the New University Club. Take it to the District Messenger Boy's office in South Audley Street and send it from there. . . . It's no use asking what this means. . . . What's the time by your watch? . . . I make it 8.30. You're three minutes slow. Put your watch on. . . . All right. By each of our watches the time is 8.30. At eleven o'clock to the minute I shall open your front door. You'll see that there's nobody about. . . . I shall go straight to your study. You'll be there waiting for me. . . . It's no good asking any questions. What I'm doing, I'm doing for the sake of your honour, for the sake of my sister's honour, for the sake of the child's honour."

Then he rang off.

He put on a thick coat, went to the drawer in his writing-table, took out something heavy and glittering, and put it into his pocket. Then he shut up his chambers and walked slowly towards his club. The two or three men who greeted him on the way he did not see. On his arrival he took a misshapen, clumsy envelope from the hall porter, and, dinnerless, walked on to Green Street

CHAPTER XXIX

THE ANNIVERSARY

WHEN he found himself outside Gwen's door, he was suddenly confronted by the question, "What have I come here for?" He had stopped automatically at the porch. He had no idea whether she was in or out. He scarcely remembered the streets through which he had passed since leaving the club. The sole solution of his presence on the steps seemed to him that Gwendolen was his natural refuge in time of sorrow. His nerves were strung to the highest pitch. He felt that, unless he was soothed until eleven o'clock, his agony would be intolerable.

Though he had no intention of telling her anything about the critical position of Billy Brinstable, he knew that her company would have a sedative effect upon his whirling brain. If he could induce her to let him lie down on the sofa whilst she played music—soft, dreamy music—all would be comparatively well.

Supposing she were out! He shuddered at the thought. Then he would pace up and down the streets till eleven o'clock. He was convinced that no society but hers would be tolerable to him.

Whilst he was waiting for an answer to the bell, he trembled at the possibility that she might be out, or that she might be alone with Wilfred—Wilfred in one of his garrulous moods.

It was with a sigh of relief that he heard Younghusband's answer that Mrs. Ainslie was in.

"Is she alone?" he asked.

"Yes, sir; Mr. Ainslie went out immediately after dinner."

He found Gwendolen in the library. She was sitting in a straight-backed red leather chair. There was no book by her side, no newspaper within her reach. Her thoughts absorbed her.

On the announcement made by the butler, she turned hastily towards the door.

Richard caught her glance before it reached him. It was unmistakably a glance of annoyance, almost of dislike. Then when her eyes perceived him, the expression changed to—something he had never seen before.

The door closed.

"Richard," she cried, and rushed towards him, "what's the matter?"

She stared at his haggard face, an unhealthy pallor beneath the skin. Lines that had hitherto been merely indicated were now deep furrows; they told of stark determination; they told of acute grief.

He stood as one dazed by the light, wearing his top coat and carrying his hat in his hand.

Slowly, with expressionless eyes, he moved to the chair which Gwendolen had vacated, and dropped into it. His hat fell on the floor; his arms sank on to the arms of the chair.

And then he looked up at her; in his eyes an obvious craving for sympathy.

She stood above him, bewildered. His eyes asked for tenderness. They pleaded for consolation.

She spoke no word.

Eye to eye, they stared at one another.

Through her brain flashed a contrast between the aggressive cross-examiner who—for money—had ruined a

woman's life—a man she hated—and the limp, sorrow-stricken sufferer whom she loved.

In his mind was only one thought. "Why did she not take him in her arms?" If she had taken him in her arms at that moment she would have witnessed a sight the most terrible in the world: the sight of a strong man when he weeps. If she had thrown her arms about him, as her instinct told her to do, he would have revealed to her the secret chamber of his soul. She would have made him more hers than he had ever been before. He would have belonged more completely to her than it is often given for a man to belong to a woman. He was in the depths of sorrow; the deep black depths from which we can see no egress. Had she given him comfort then, she would have been in the eyes of his soul an angel of mercy until his death. He was suffering to the extreme limit of sorrow. He had the power of suffering to an extent that is rarely found in men. Most of us can scale the highest pinnacles of joy, but there are not many natures capable of being dragged down to the lowest depths of woe. It is a fine-spun character that can be miserable to this degree.

Still she stood above him and made no movement. Almost callously she regarded the pathos in his eyes. She was in arms for her sex. Hers was the battle of the innocent little woman who had cowered in the witness-box that morning.

It seemed to her, who had brooded upon the cruelty, upon the injustice of the man she loved ever since she had seen the hideous curl of contempt upon his lips, that he had realised the turpitude of his conduct; that he, who had inflicted so dire a wrong upon a woman, now felt himself unworthy of a woman's love. She herself had despised her lover in her heart. She had gone secretly to see him at the work that was making him famous—and she had

seen—oh, God! Hundreds of bitter phrases had sprung to her mind wherewith to taunt him with his cruelty to womanhood. The sight of his dejection by no means mollified her. It appeared to her right that one who had behaved so abominably should suffer in no slight measure. Here, indeed, was justice—in that a man who had ruined a woman's reputation should himself be a limp, haggard shadow of his former self.

Coldly, at length, she spoke.

“Well?”

Deep in his throat he murmured: “Kiss me, Gwen! For heaven's sake, kiss me! You don't know what I've suffered—what I am suffering! Say nothing, but kiss me.”

“I don't know what you have suffered,” she answered—she spoke slowly, firmly, with no note of tenderness in her voice—“but all you suffer—all you may suffer—you deserve.”

Instantly he was on his defence.

“No, no, no!” he cried. “I've deserved nothing. I've done my best!”

“This morning,” she said, “I hated you. I'm not sure that I don't hate you now.”

He raised his eyebrows.

“How could you? How could you? That innocent little woman!”

Again his eyebrows were notes of interrogation.

“That woman in the witness-box! That innocent woman. You know she was innocent! Now”—her words came quickly—“you know exactly what occurred in that case. You know the type of man the co-respondent was—talk, talk, talk, that's all. That class of man talks to women as women talk to one another—of dress, of scandal, even of babies, at a pinch. It's as clear as the day that the woman loved him. She wrote those letters because she

loved him, and then she found out—what the little wretch was. And you—you, by means of tricks and traps have proved in the eyes of the world that this—thing was her lover! Do you see what you've done, Richard? What do you think that woman is suffering now? How she must hate you! To think that I've kissed your lips! To think that I have believed you mine! To know that—as God sees me, I believe that you would let yourself be retained by Wilfred to prove my infidelity.”

He made no attempt to protect himself against her indignation. He was in no mood to fight for himself. He yearned for tenderness, and, instead, he only found grievous accusations. To him it seemed that the incidents in the Divorce Court had happened many years ago. The case of Mrs. Cummidge was of no more interest to him than had been the case in which the manager of St. Alphonse had brought about a miscarriage of justice. These things were past.

Now there was an *entr'acte* in his life. The curtain would rise at eleven o'clock. Till then he wanted quiet, he wanted peace. Above all, he wanted sympathy for himself. His shattered nerves would not allow him to listen to Gwen's tirade. Her attitude, which he had not taken the pains to analyse, had come as a shock. Not so much was he annoyed at her lack of understanding as he was unsatisfied in his quest for sympathy. He had come to her house as to a haven of rest before grappling with a crisis that required his entire stock of fortitude. If he could not obtain encouragement from her, he could obtain it nowhere. He would walk about the streets.

Suddenly he rose.

“What are you doing?” she cried. “You're not going?”

Drawing a deep breath, he said:

"Yes, it is now five minutes past ten." To himself he said: "Fifty-five minutes more."

"Where are you going?" she asked.

"I am going," he answered.

"No, no, not like that! Oh, Dick, Dick, what's the matter? Something terrible's the matter. I don't believe it's all remorse."

He caught the word "remorse."

"Remorse? What for?"

"For your—murder of that little woman this morning!"

"Was it only this morning?" he answered. "It seems to me weeks and weeks ago. I had forgotten all about it."

She put her hands on the thick cloth of his overcoat and stared into his face.

"Do you think that she'll ever forget this morning? Do you think that she'll ever forget your face and your cruel smile?"

With her tender, white fingers she traced the curves of his mouth.

"There are those lips. No, no! They're not as they used to be. They seem to be cruelly curled even now. There is a deep line at each corner—a line that I have never been able to kiss away. And sometimes, Richard, I thought you had a mouth like a Cupid's bow; almost too beautiful for a man, it seemed. And to think"—she hesitated—"and to think! oh, to think that you could look like that! I suppose that there is in each of us something that the other does not suspect. And yet I fancied that there was nothing about you that was secret from me. I thought that I knew every line and every curve of you. And—I don't know the worst part of you. There is a depth of cruelty that I hadn't fathomed—that I hadn't dreamed of. After this morning I shall always be frightened of you."

Suddenly she gave a little cry of horror.

She recoiled from him.

He was standing gaunt and sinister.

It seemed that all his face had shrunken into his profile. His eyes appeared to have sunk deep into his head and to glare forth doom. It was as though there was a sheet of metal behind his eyes. His hands were thrust into the pockets of his coat, and he was looking—right through her—at something that was dying in agony at his glance.

For two or three minutes she stared at him as he stood motionless. It was not apparent to her that he realised she was in the room.

Slowly, with heavy steps, he walked towards the door.

She sprang on him.

“Come back!”

He looked at his watch.

“It is twenty minutes past ten.”

“Why should you always be looking at the time?”

Absently he answered:

“Forty minutes more.”

“Come here, Richard; I can’t stand this horror. Be yourself. What’s the matter?”

She hesitated for an instant, and then she seized him by the shoulders. She was surprised to find with what ease she pulled him to the sofa.

“Take off your coat!” she ordered.

He stood up, and she pulled it from his arms. As it dropped on the floor, she heard a dull thud.

The two were face to face on the sofa.

As if influenced by some premonition of evil, she whispered:

“What’s that?”

In a low voice he answered “Nothing,” and he bundled up the coat beside him on the sofa. Then his eyes wan-

dered. His hand sought his cigarette-case in which a single opal was set. He opened it. It was empty. She watched him curiously. As he was on the point of replacing it in his pocket, she stopped him.

Never mind," she said. "I've got some cigarettes here. Have you forgotten?"

"Forgotten? Forgotten what?"

"What day this is."

He passed his hand across his forehead as he sat down.

"I really don't know. I haven't noticed."

"Look!" she said fiercely. "Look, look! Your work, your hideous work has made you forget what day this is!"

She held the cigarette-case up to his face, where he could see engraved on the outside in her own handwriting:

February 16, 1904, 11 p.m.

At these words he dropped his cigarette-case tingling to the floor.

"Eleven p.m.," he echoed. "Yes. Twenty minutes more," he said, looking at his watch.

"It's our anniversary!" she cried, a flash of indignation in her voice; "and that's how you treat me! Our anniversary! And you speak as though you were going to face death. And you had forgotten it till now! Oh, Richard, Richard, no wonder when you are spending your life investigating the details of other women's lives, no wonder you forget about me. Go to the glass, and look what it has brought you to. You are a worn and haggard man. Look at yourself. And you have forgotten our anniversary! I've been thinking of it for days and days. But I didn't insult you by reminding you of it. I thought you would prepare some surprise for me. But, do you know, when I saw you this morning I almost hoped you wouldn't; indeed, I sincerely hoped you wouldn't. And as this is our anniversary, our sacred day, I thought I

should like to see how you were spending it, and—I went down to the Law Courts—and I saw—”

Suddenly he sprang up.

“If you love me, not a word, Gwen, my darling; you don’t understand. You’ve got to do something for me now.” His voice was imperious. “Go to the piano and play me music—Bach, Chopin, Beethoven, any of that sort of music—that’s the sort of thing I want—anything soft and soothing. Play me soft, soothing music for ten minutes. Ten minutes by the clock; not a moment longer.”

She protested in amazement:

“You’re all nerves.”

He stretched out his hand to the piano.

“Do as I tell you or I’ll leave the house. I will leave it for ever. I will leave you altogether. My God, do as I tell you!”

And she did as he told her.

He lay at full length on the sofa, his eyes closed. She threw occasional glances at him, and fancied that he slept.

Suddenly she ceased.

“I think it is ten minutes now.”

Again he looked at his watch.

He rose quickly. “I must go.”

“You will leave me like that? Oh, no, you can’t do that—on our anniversary! Oh, no, Richard, you can’t leave me! Wilfred won’t be home before twelve at the earliest.”

He looked at her, and then deliberately put on his coat and picked up his hat.

“What have I done?” she pleaded.

“Nothing—darling.”

“Aren’t you going to kiss me?”

Instantly his arm stretched towards her. But he withdrew it.

"No," he answered, "I can't kiss you to-night. I would give all the world to kiss you to-night, but I can't kiss you—to-night."

In an agony of apprehension she rushed towards him.

"What have you got in your coat?"

With a swift movement he had reached the door.

CHAPTER XXX

THE CRY IN THE NIGHT

PRECISELY at eleven o'clock Richard stood in the porch of Billy's house in Tilney Street. The street was deserted. In the distance, he could hear the steps of a constable. The houses on the opposite side of the way were shrouded in darkness.

He placed the key in the door and opened it. Then he closed the door silently. He listened for any sound in the house, but all was still.

He walked across the tessellated pavement of the entrance hall on to the carpet. Within half a minute, he had turned the handle of the study and closed the door.

Seated at a desk facing the window, he saw Billy's back. The figure made no move.

"Billy," he said.

The man rose with a quick, startled movement. His face was hideous, grotesque, terrible. His complexion was mottled and flabby. His eyes appeared to have been driven into his head by pulpy adiposity. The mouth drooped at the corners—the shoulders slouched forward; it seemed as though the frame had lost the power of supporting the body. Billy had always been vulgar. To-night, in his frock-coat, he appeared like a workman, say a carpenter, in his Sunday clothes, entirely out of place in a room furnished with bourgeois luxury, saddle-bag upholstery, and imitation Sheraton work.

Richard stood at the door, a lean figure. An avenger, in Billy's eyes.

With a pitiable effort he moved towards his brother-in-law and held out a limp hand.

Richard did not take it.

In a voice that he hardly recognised, so husky and uncertain was it, Billy said:

"What's the meaning of all this?"

Richard, with his hands deep down in his pockets, stood towering above him.

"Sit down!"

The other man was on the point of protesting, but his eyes met Richard's, and then they fell.

"Sit down," he repeated. He was surprised that Billy obeyed him.

He sat down in a large arm-chair, and stretched out a shaking hand towards a half-empty carafe of whisky in the tantalus on the table.

Richard's hand shot out.

"Wait! Not yet."

"What do you mean?" The tremulous voice was out of harmony with the violence of the question.

"Have your servants gone to bed?"

"The parlourmaid is downstairs. The doctor and the nurse are with Ethel. It may happen at any moment."

"No one knows I am here?"

"No, why the devil *are* you here? Can't you behave like a human being? Can't you sit down?"

"Billy, I'm going to behave very much like a human being."

"Speak out, speak out. I can't bear this." His collar was soaked with perspiration. He was perspiring at every pore; his face and hands were shining.

Richard moved across the hearth-rug, and stood in front of him.

"Can't you speak?" cried Billy. "What the devil's the meaning of all this mystery?"

Slowly Richard spoke. He could hear the ticking of the clock through his words.

"To-morrow morning there will be a warrant issued for your arrest!"

Billy's eyes blinked. His hands fell by the sides of the arm-chair. Richard could see that his lips were framing the words "For my arrest?" But no sound came.

"What are you going to do?"

No answer came from the lips. The eyes blinked horribly. He was a mass of inert consternation. At last he spoke one word, "Do?"

Furious at his futile terror, Richard shook him by the shoulder.

"Yes, *do!* What are you going to *do?* You've allowed Ethel to face the shame here. What are you going to do?"

Suddenly, the fat head fell back on the top of the chair. The body heaved. "Do? Oh, my God, do! What the devil can I do?"

And this was the man—this wreck devoid of purpose, caught in the meshes of his own crime—who had married his sister. Richard felt that he could have battered out his brains with—something cold that he held tightly clenched in his pocket.

Slowly the head moved forward, a hand moved out towards the tantalus.

Richard struck it down—viciously, angrily.

The blow brought the crushed man to some sense of his position. With eyes peering slyly at Richard, he whispered:

"Can't I get away?"

"Get away?" sneered the other. "Get away? Where on God's earth can you go? They would have you back

from anywhere. You coward! You cur! That's your first thought, is it? To save your skin! To leave Ethel, and your child to bear the ignominy of it all!"

In spite of his determination to keep calm, fury had him in its grip.

"Why the devil didn't you send Ethel away to some place where she wouldn't hear just at this moment?"

He sighed a weary sigh of hopeless despair.

"I had no money. I haven't any money at all. It's all gone; every penny. I'm in debt all round. Besides, I was afraid, I was afraid. There came a time when I knew it must happen. And I wanted Ethel. I love Ethel."

Then his head fell forward and buried itself in the fat hands. His body shook. He was crying, crying, and his agony shook his whole frame.

But for him there was no mercy.

Richard put his hand on his shoulder and shook him.

"There's no time for that. You've got to think. You've got to decide what you'll do. I am going to decide what you'll do."

Then he turned on Richard.

"You are not my judge."

"I am not your judge," came the cold answer. "But I know what your sentence will be. I have seen the papers in the case and your sentence will be ten years."

The pink in his face had faded to yellow as Billy sank back into a chair.

"Ten years! Oh, my God, my God, I can't go through it! I'm not strong! I'm not strong! Ten years behind prison bars! Ten years without Ethel! I can't go through it. I can't."

Then he rose suddenly.

"Richard, with your influence, you can do something

for me. You're my brother-in-law. Can't you go to the Treasury? Can't you do something?"

"I can do nothing," answered Richard.

"Yes, but look at the scandal! You must do something. If I get away, you can use your influence. You are a great power. You can see that I am not brought back."

"There are only two places from which you can't be brought back."

"What are they?" cried Billy, a gleam of hope lighting up his face.

"Heaven and Hell."

The two men were standing face to face. The one, cold and merciless, who was passing the death sentence upon a shivering criminal; the other, a broken, hopeless man.

"Haven't you enough courage to do the right thing?"

Billy fell back in the chair, huddled and cowering.

"No, no, no! I can't, I can't!"

"Have you the courage," asked Richard, "to stand up in the Old Bailey and receive a sentence that is worse than Hell? To suffer for years and years the torture of the soul and of the body? To know that while you are eating prison bread, associating with only the outcasts of the world, your wife and your child are also—through your doing—outcasts from the world. If you were found dead here, their honour would be saved. One minute's courage, one minute's pain would save you years of the most hopeless sorrow, the most terrible agony. I'm not here to advise you. I'm here to tell you what to do."

Purple tinges had sprung out on the wretched man's face. The puffiness under the eyes was outlined with deep black.

"I can't! I can't!" he moaned.

"I will look after my sister and my sister's child. You need have no fear upon that score."

"Is there no hope?" he gasped.

"If there were any hope, I should be here to give it you. There is no hope."

"But I have nothing here. I have nothing with which I could—"

"I've thought of that," answered Richard.

From his pocket he drew forth a revolver, cold and glittering.

"Another man took his life with this. The other man died to save his honour. You will die to save the honour of three people."

Billy stared at him with stony eyes. He took his handkerchief from his pocket and wiped the moisture from his hands.

"What is your answer?" Richard asked, putting the revolver on the table.

Billy took it in his right hand, the fingers of his left passed slowly along the barrel. He seemed scarcely to notice what he was doing, and then, with a movement almost of terror, he put it back on the table.

"What is your answer?" thundered Richard.

Billy's head was supported on the palm of one hand. Richard noticed that he was getting very bald, that the skull glistened through the greasy hair.

"I'll do it," he said, in a quivering whisper.

Then he raised his head and looked Richard in the face.

Richard interrupted the query.

With his fingers, he gently touched Billy's right temple.

The doomed man nodded:

"I see."

"I shall go into the hall," said Richard. "Directly I

am out of the room, you will lock the door. Yes, the key is in the door. Here is the latchkey you sent me. When I have heard the shot fired, I shall leave the house. Not before. Remember, I'm waiting."

"I understand."

Billy stretched out his hand and poured out half a tumblerful of brandy.

Richard stopped him:

"That'll be enough."

He took up the cut glass bottles of brandy and whisky and emptied their contents on the floor. Then he held out his hand.

Billy gulped down the brandy—half of it. He stared at Richard. His eyes sparkled.

"No, no. Not that. I've always hated you, and I hate you now. You needn't be afraid of my courage. It won't fail me."

Then Richard walked to the door.

The key was turned on the inside. There was silence in the house. The grandfather's clock in the hall struck a quarter to twelve with the chimes that brought good cheer to Whittington. "Turn again, Whittington," they said. He listened. "Turn again, Whittington, Lord Mayor of London." He compelled his mind to listen to the chimes. Twice they had struck.

Suddenly a dull report. He had never thought that a revolver-shot sounded like that. Then the thud of a falling body on the floor. "Turn again, Whittington."—Then silence. Silence complete, terrible, cold as the grave.

He heard a rattle in his own throat. Limp, almost at the end of his forces, he staggered to the front door and closed it clumsily yet silently. Out into the night

air he went precipitately from the house. With long strides he crossed the street. Then he looked up at the house. There were lights in the windows above the drawing-room floor.

In the stillness of the night a woman's shriek, a shriek poignant of agony, came from those windows.

CHAPTER XXXI

THE REVOLVER

THE suicide of Billy occurred unhappily at a moment when there was dearth of news. Therefore the papers devoted to it an amount of attention out of all proportion to its importance.

Greatly to the annoyance of Richard, in many journals the deceased was spoken of as "Mr. William Brinstable, brother-in-law of Mr. Cliftonville, the eminent actor, and Mr. Richard Meyville, the well-known barrister."

On this matter Richard had an interview with his brother at the theatre during a *matinée*. He spoke hotly to him between the acts while Montague was nervously adding dabs of make-up to his face.

"You don't seem to understand, Montague, that all advertisement is not good advertisement. Upon my soul, I don't think that you have any sense of the fitness of things at all."

"What? How?" asked the other.

"You heard what I said."

"Yes, and I think my dresser heard too. It is not respectful to talk to me in the way you do."

"My dear Montague," answered Richard, "I've never pretended to respect you. I don't think that you respect yourself."

"What? How?"

"No man who had any respect for himself would deliberately arrange to be advertised by means of his brother-in-law's disgrace."

"So it was disgraceful, was it?"

"It was disgraceful. Billy had—muddled his affairs terribly and Ethel is left without a penny. Thank God, she's all right—doing well. The girl is a healthy infant. Ethel doesn't know that she's a widow. She will not be told just yet. I attended the inquest this morning."

"Yes," answered Montague. "I saw by the papers that you were there. I ought to have gone, perhaps. Yes, I certainly ought to have gone."

Richard saw what was passing through the actor's mind. Had he attended the inquest, the papers would have mentioned the fact.

In supreme contempt for his brother's insane love of publicity, he said:—

"I believe, Montague, that you would consider it a good advertisement to be tried for murder."

Montague took him seriously.

"My God, yes! What a thing that would be, eh?—provided one was acquitted. Even if one only got the benefit of the doubt—it would be a splendid advertisement."

Richard could hardly control his disgust. In a cold voice he said:

"Of course, as you are the elder brother, it is your privilege to look after Ethel."

Montague gazed up at him with eyes of horror.

Richard smiled.

"It is your privilege, of course. But as your benevolence could not possibly be alluded to in the papers, I doubt whether it would be worth your while. I will be responsible for her future."

"Yes; perhaps you had better. You have more time."

Richard's statement as to his intentions with regard to Ethel had been so welcome to him that he had not

troubled to resent the allusion to his fondness for advertisement.

"Everything she has," said Richard, "will go. The brokers are in the house already."

"Oh dear, oh dear, how awful! This must be kept out of the papers; absolutely out of the papers. Damn it!" he cried indignantly, flinging down the stick of grease paint and dabbing some powder on his cheek, "if it gets about that my sister has the brokers in her house, it may interfere with my knighthood."

Richard, out of devilry, enquired:

"How would it be for you to *buy* the brokers out?"

He made no direct answer, but stood up, and striking an attitude of wonderful beauty and grace, said:

"Richard, I'll tell you what I'll do. If my new piece is a success—it's the finest part that I have ever had, I'm on the stage for the whole of the third act—I'll go halves with you in whatever you do for Ethel."

And he held out a dramatic hand to seal the lavish bargain.

At that moment the call-boy's voice was heard:

"Mr. Cliftonville, if you please."

And the eminent actor hurried off.

Richard, on returning to the Temple, instantly saw from John's face that something was amiss. The clerk gazed mysteriously at him, and followed him into his room.

"I suppose, sir, you'll be able to keep appointments for this afternoon? There are three consultations."

"Certainly. You've got the Bill of Exchange case taken out of the list?"

"Yes, sir. Counsel on the other side were quite willing under the circumstances. I think the inquest went off very well, considering."

"How do you mean 'considering'? What do you mean?"

John had been in attendance upon Richard before the coroner.

"Well, sir, of course it was a case of suicide; a deliberate case. But sometimes these juries are not willing to add 'While of unsound mind.'"

"Still," said Richard, "Dr. Braxton-Drewe knows his business."

"Nobody better, sir."

Why, thought Richard, didn't the man go away? Why did he stand staring at him with curious eyes? Why had he ventured to suggest it wasn't a case of suicide?

Uneasily shuffling his feet, while he rubbed his fat chin with his hand, John said:

"The coroner's officer is an old friend of mine. I've known him for many years. And he showed me the revolver that Mr. Brinstable shot himself with."

Richard darted a glance at the clerk.

Moseley, now immovable, stared at him. Each knew what was passing in the other's mind. It was clear to Richard that John knew of his share in the death of Billy. John knew that Richard was aware of his knowledge.

"That will do, John," said Richard sharply.

When the door had closed, he threw himself back in his chair and summed up the situation.

"He knows," he reflected, "that I took the revolver to Billy. He recognized the revolver. He knows that I compelled Billy to shoot himself. He knows that, in point of law, I am an accessory before the fact; that, technically, I am—guilty of murder."

He laughed. There was hysterical cynicism in his laughter.

"Good heavens! I am liable to be hanged—by the neck until I am dead! And the Lord may be requested to have mercy on my soul. And a chubby, red-faced parson might be called upon to say 'Amen.' Good heavens! This is a slice out of the comedy of life! I shall go down to the Old Bailey to defend the French Jewess, when my place is really in the dock. What infernal nonsense the law is! I'm a murderer; that's what I am, technically a murderer."

He cast a contemptuous glance upon the volumes in his bookcases.

"The solution of the whole thing is that each man must be a law to himself. There is only one tribunal by which we can be tried justly, and that is the tribunal of our own hearts."

He went up to the mantelpiece and looked into the glass:

"I'm looking devilish old, but I'm not guilty."

He stretched out his face closer to the mirror.

"I may not be good-looking, but I'm a good sort. It's a strange thing," he thought, "that perhaps the only really good action of my life is, in point of law, a crime."

He attached no great importance to Moseley's knowledge of his share in the matter of Billy's death. Moseley was a man of sound sense and great discretion. Still, he was now completely in Moseley's hands.

Owing to Billy's suicide, nothing more was heard of the proposed prosecution of "A. B." The general belief born of the affair was that Billy, on seeing bankruptcy staring him in the face, as the result of rash speculations, had committed suicide, to save his honour, for the sake of his wife and child.

Everyone expressed deep sympathy for Ethel. But everyone remembered all the weak points in Billy.

As soon as she was well enough to leave London,

Richard sent her, with his mother, to Bexhill. His own solicitor undertook the winding up of Billy's affairs which were, of course, in a hopeless condition. Nothing could be saved from the wreck.

The additional encumbrances imposed upon him induced him to work, if possible, even harder than before. He was obliged to spend at his chambers much of the time that he had previously devoted to Gwendolen. Much to her annoyance, he became, to her thinking, a mere automaton. Sometimes three days would pass wherein she did not see him. And John firmly discouraged all telephonic communication. Often, however, at two or three in the morning, she from her bed, would telephone to him, in his bed.

They would have long talks in the silence of the night. Talks that from the circumstances in which they were placed, gave to each other almost a physical pleasure. But in this pleasure there was also an element of physical pain. It seemed to her intolerable that here was a man whose voice she could hear, whose body she could picture, lying alone in his solitary flat, whilst she, a miracle of soft, white beauty and fluffy silk, was longing to stretch out her arms to bind him to her.

Sometimes she would suddenly ring off abruptly with the cry:

"Oh, my darling, I can't bear it. You are killing me!"

CHAPTER XXXII

THE HINT OF THE "HANGING JUDGE"

THE sudden death of "Jack" Bishop, the leader of the Parliamentary Bar, created a sensation among the practitioners at Westminster. For many years this genial man had been making anything between £35,000 and £40,000 a year. Now a large amount of work would be thrown, so to speak, upon the market. Richard, of course, would not profit thereby, except, perhaps, indirectly. But the leading K. C's who practised before the committees expected very considerable additions to their incomes.

One morning, two days after the great man's death, John, with a glow of pleasure on his face, came into Richard's chambers in Parliament Street.

"The managing clerk of the solicitors to the Great Southern Railway has just been here, sir. He says that if you will take silk he will give you all the legal business of the Great Southern. That will mean at least £5,000 a year."

This, indeed, was brilliant news.

"You must take silk at once, sir. You must write to the Lord Chancellor to-day."

The taking of silk is always a hazardous step, but with a guarantee of £5,000 from one railway company alone it would have been ridiculous for Richard to hesitate. Besides, John drew a rose-coloured picture of the future. Once established as leading counsel for the Great Southern,

he would get an enormous amount of other work. He stood to lose nothing; he was bound to gain.

The one feature that marred his delight at the news was the fact that it seemed to him obvious that the offer had been inspired by Lashbridge. He knew that energetic and versatile peer took considerable interest in railway affairs. He was no dummy chairman. It was impossible for Richard to blind his eyes to the fact that the offer had come from his rival. Still, so advantageous was the offer that it would be impossible for him to neglect any step towards its acceptance.

Immediately he wrote to the Chancellor and to all the seniors on his circuit.

Within two days came a formal acknowledgment of his letter.

Then a fortnight passed without further news. Every morning John enquired as to the matter. It seemed to the clerk strange that a man so obviously entitled to the honour should not have instantly received it.

One day, when Richard happened to be conducting a case before Tufnell, he received at the luncheon adjournment a note from the judge, asking him to come and see him in his private room.

He found him in his red and black robes, his wig off, occupied in devouring a steak.

At the barrister's entrance he did not desist from his meal. But between huge mouthfuls he merely said:

"I hear from the Chancellor that you've applied for silk. You won't get it!"

Richard exclaimed in surprise:

"Won't get it?"

"The Chancellor is an extraordinary man. You remember—well, perhaps it was before your time, but, anyway, you must have heard how a shady financier,

an Irishman, a man called Vincent Skrene, made violent love to his wife. That was just before he became Attorney-General."

Richard was on the point of asking what bearing the Chancellor's private affairs had upon his application, when the judge shot a piercing glance at him. "There's not the slightest chance. Have you the slightest chance? You haven't."

Then Richard understood.

"You're between the devil and the deep sea," said Tufnell. "If you throw over the woman, you're a cur; if you don't, you'll remain a junior to the end of your days. Is there any way out? No, of course there isn't."

All the colour had sunk out of Richard's face.

His obvious distress touched the kindly heart of the raw-boned man. He would have gladly given Richard shrewd advice. But in spite of his vast experience of men, of women, of character and passion, for the life of him he didn't know what advice to give.

For a minute or two he ate hard, like a famished eagle. Richard, standing by his side, gazed, fascinated, at the aquiline profile, at the mottled claw-like hands as they plied noisily with the knife and fork.

"If you like to listen, listen. If you don't, you can go away—I thought you'd gone. You haven't. Listen or not, as you like. Give it up. That's my advice. Give her up. Never mind about being a cur. You've got a lot before you"—here he had trouble with a tough piece of meat—"or you've nothing; a big future, or—drab dulness—and damnation; and you'll deserve it."

He seemed to be soliloquising as he ate his food.

Yet Richard listened, spellbound.

He felt that the man was, in his strange way, giving him advice of vital value.

"You're in love with her. She's in love with you. She's married. You're not married to her. You're both—wrong 'uns; that's the expression. It's a beastly expression. But it serves for people who are doing a beastly thing. Don't let me keep you."

Richard stood still.

"You can stand that?" The judge did not look up.

"Any answer? Any defence? No, of course not. How could there be?"

There was in the old man some mysterious power that compelled silence. Something even that struck terror into the young man. He felt that he was not being addressed by a mere friend, an ordinary man whom one might meet at dinner, but by a judge in a semi-official capacity—by a judge who rarely erred in his decisions, a judge who had sent more prisoners to the gallows than any other man of our time, but who had sent no one wrongly to his doom. It was Tufnell who had tried Prinpski, one of the leading Jewish criminals of the last century. In spite of the fact that all the Polish Jews in England had moved heaven and earth—and purses—to secure the reprieve of their compatriot, Tufnell had been firm, and declined, even at the Home Secretary's request, to admit there could be any doubt in the matter—and Prinpski had confessed his guilt upon the scaffold.

This stern man, with his vast knowledge of men and life, had condescended to take an interest in his future.

In his heart he felt that the judge was right.

Tufnell continued.

Though in his demeanour there was nothing to show that he felt any degree of nervousness in accomplishing

his task, in very truth he felt horribly afraid lest he should bungle it. Therefore he took refuge in generalities.

"I am no more moral than anybody else. An enormous amount of nonsense is talked about morality. As a matter of fact, it is a new invention with the upper classes. It was discovered in the reign of Queen Victoria, and it has not had much chance to become popular yet. Was society moral in the days of the Tudors or the Stuarts or the Hanoverians? Who has ever said it was?"

Here he flashed a hostile glance at Richard.

"But you are not the Court. You are not society. Also the days of Bohemian barristers are over. A barrister must lead a decent life. What do you want to ape the immorality of your betters for? That is the curse of the country in our time—the immorality of the middle classes. Now that corruption is spreading downwards, and has become a habit of the million instead of a fashion confined to the wealthy or well-bred, the next generation will have the deuce to pay."

The judge paused and hesitated. Then came a softer note in his voice as he spoke.

"Richard,"—he had never called him by his Christian name before—"you are the next generation. I was at Cambridge with your father. I was senior to him. But he is responsible for all this. He was the vainest man I ever met. Of course, your brother has got the full eldest son's inheritance. But you are touched with it, Richard. Falling in love with another man's wife is often the result of vanity rather than—well, of anything else."

"But you said—"

Stern at the symptom of opposition, Tufnell glared at him.

"Yes," he interposed, in a deep voice, "I said you were a wrong 'un, and I stick to it. And the strange thing is

that you don't know it. And I warrant that you and she believe that you are hero and heroine in some poetical drama. But you're not. And," he repeated, shaking his head, "you're wrong 'uns, that's what you are—wrong 'uns."

Very simply Richard said:

"I am in love with her."

Tufnell stared keenly at him for a second. But the keenness of his eyes was counterbalanced by the softening of his lips. Then he went on eating.

"Come here," he said brusquely, as he poured some Worcester sauce over the mass of potato on his plate. He looked up, and held out his hand, gripping Richard's.

"Do the right thing, whatever it is. Do I know what the right thing is in an affair of this sort? No, I'm damned if I do! But you'll do it. Good luck! I'm going to sum up against you in this case. You haven't a leg to stand on. But you've done it very well."

There was nothing more to be said, and the young barrister went out of the room in a state bordering on physical collapse.

John was his partner in the matter. He was the partner in his forensic life. How could he possibly go to him and say: "You've set my feet on the high road to fortune. You've financed me. And now, because I'm in love with a woman, my career must be stopped when I'm in the full tide of prosperity." How could he say that?

Limp and lifeless was his speech after lunch. All the strength had gone out of him. He was oppressed by the terrible weight of his dilemma. There seemed to be no possible course open but to go to Mrs. Ainslie and say:

"I love you more than I have ever loved you before. In the days of despair and sorrow you comforted me. I am

now on the high road to wealth and fame, and I must travel alone."

No decent man could say that to a woman. Even if he didn't love her, such a statement would be impossible. But he loved her passionately. He worshipped her. He was intimate with all the secrets of her soul. Were she out of his life, he would be emasculated, since she meant all womanhood to him. To give up her body; to abandon his worship at that white satin shrine. Never more to know the perfume of her fragrant flesh—No, no! That would be suicide.

Side by side in his brain were the case for his client and these reflections as he spoke. Tufnell gazed at him with piercing eyes. He understood the terrible struggle in the young man's heart.

Almost unknowingly the summing-up, which he had intended to be dead against Richard, became more or less a compliment to the distraught counsel's intellectual powers, and the jury found in Richard's favour.

"God bless my soul!" said the K. C. on the other side, "you do have the most extraordinary luck, Meyville! Do you know what it is to lose a case?"

Richard's thoughts were far away. It is doubtful whether he actually answered in words the question of the "silk." But his heart framed the reply. "I know what it is to lose—everything."

After two days of misery and two nights of pain he selected his course.

So obvious was the course before him that, cruel, pitiful, and agonising though it would be, it took him an almost incredibly short space of time to see that he must say good-bye to her. The sooner the better. Having schooled his mind to this decision, it seemed to him that he must communicate it to her instantly.

Without deciding in what manner this terrible blow—terrible for him and terrible for her—should fall, he rang her up on the telephone.

“Can I see you any time this afternoon?”

He had been fortunate in catching her as she was on the point of going out. She would be in at dinner. Would he come then—at 8 o'clock?

He hesitated. He would prefer to walk into her drawing-room in the afternoon, to state suddenly his determination, and then to leave the house. The idea of sitting through dinner with her, and then telling her afterwards, seemed to him an unnecessary and cruel accentuation of pain.

But his hesitation had told her that he was disengaged.

“Come to dinner at eight,” she said. “Wilfred is not well. He is keeping to his room.”

Therefore at eight it was that he arrived at Green Street.

Obviously Gwendolen had dressed with extraordinary care to please him.

As she greeted him in a black dress that fitted her figure to perfection, he attempted, clumsily, no doubt, to make a mental picture of her appearance, a picture that would haunt him till his death. He would say good-bye to her in that dress of black. Perhaps he would never kiss her lips again. He hesitated to kiss them now. But she, in her overwhelming joy at his arrival, noticed only that his face was set in hard lines.

“Wilfred is in a fearful state,” she said. “He’s taken to lying in bed all one day, and then going out in any sort of weather all the next.”

“What a man!”

“He wants you to go up after dinner and talk,” she added. “If it wasn’t such an old story now, yours and mine—if Wilfred and I had ever been seriously married—I simply couldn’t bear it—Wilfred’s fondness for you.”

She had ordered for him an exquisite dinner. She was full of news, of trivial, amusing anecdotes which she rattled off. The hard expression of his face seemed to her not altogether unbecoming in a successful barrister. Grave and austere though he appeared to her, she knew that as a lover he was passionate, and that in his passion there was no trace of austerity, but with greedy hands he plucked the best fruits of love. Therefore the contrast of his expression and his temperament gave her a subtle, secret pleasure.

"Such a funny thing happened to-day," she said, when the footman had left the room, and Richard was smoking a cigar. "You noticed that Thomas waited on us? Well, Younghusband has gone."

"Gone?"

"Yes; he came to me this morning—you know his strange little stupid face—and gave notice. Wanted to leave at the end of the month. I asked why. He hummed and hawed, and at last blurted out"—and she mimicked the manner of that long, lean man—"‘You know, madam, I was mixed up—or, rather, I gave evidence—in Lord Plymborough’s divorce case, and it doesn’t do a butler in my position any good to be constantly appearing—if one may say so—in the Divorce Court.’ I could scarcely believe my ears. ‘What do you mean?’ I asked. ‘Well,’ he said, ‘it’s very awkward for me to explain, but—from things I’ve noticed—I shouldn’t be at all surprised if there’s a divorce case here.’ The man spoke quite respectfully. Really, I was very much amused in spite of his impertinence. Of course, I thought he was alluding to you. But he wasn’t! He was alluding to—Lashbridge! Then, really, I became indignant. I ordered him out of the house then and there. The man is a complete ass. Kiss me, kiss me, kiss me!”

She jumped up from her seat and threw her arms round him.

"Fancy thinking of Lashbridge when he's seen my own King of Cats!"

There was no help for it. He could not tell her what was in his mind. For an instant the cowardly course of writing to her suggested itself. With her arms around him, with her soft cheek nestling against his, how was he possibly to tell her that he would never see her again? He searched his soul.

Could he, could he possibly say to her, "I am never going to see you again. Our love, though it is not at an end, though it burns fiercer than ever, is never henceforward to have any outlet. I am going into a metaphorical monastery"? How could he keep his word? There would surely be moments, burning moments, when uncontrollable desire would throw him headlong at her feet. He did not until now realise what it was that he had decided to deny himself. Though intoxicated by the perfume of her flesh, by the pressure of her curves upon his body, he was a weak, purposeless man.

"I'm going up to see Wilfred," he said suddenly.

"All right, dear. Not more than ten minutes, please. Don't let him keep you," she pleaded. "I want you, oh, so much to-night."

In an ecstasy of anticipation she waited for him.

Wilfred lay in bed, inert yet eager. His lean face seemed yellow against the pillow. His eyes, through gold-rimmed spectacles, shone brightly. To hear him, he was grievously ill, worse than he had ever been. He pointed to the tray from which he had eaten, in his own words, an unusually big dinner. He explained that he had eaten it with infinite speed, as that was the only way he could eat now, but that the food he consumed—

owing to various structural complications which he had lately detected—could not by any possibility nourish him. He was devising a system of nourishment by means of patent foods and various medicaments. He intended, as soon as he was well enough, to eat an ounce of food every three-quarters of an hour. At his side were various books of a scientific character, by the assistance of which he had evolved this system. Proudly he pointed to the bottles on the washhand stand. They were all sorts and sizes. "That's what keeps me alive," he said; "there are fifteen bottles there, and I could not do with one less."

Richard looked at them. Some were labelled "Poison."

"When, if ever, your body gets into the condition that mine is in now, you'll find that poisons are the only thing that do any good. I've taken enough poisons at different times to kill an army. But if I were to eat a rump steak it would be instant death, absolutely instant death, Richard."

"Would it, indeed?"

"It would," he answered, almost proudly. And thus he rattled on, mainly about his ailments. He complimented himself upon his continued existence. He attacked the medical profession. It was all very absurd. Still, the society of Wilfred seemed to Richard preferable to that terrible interview which was imminent with Gwen-dolen.

When he had been in the room twenty minutes he heard her voice calling his name.

"Quite right," said Wilfred. "You know she's right in many things. I ought not to talk. Talking fatigues me."

"Yes?" said Richard with an ironical smile.

"I ought never to talk—at least, not more than four or five hours a day. I'm quite sure that I ought not to talk. Certainly not after meals. In fact, I'm not sure but that *all* talking between meals is wrong."

To humour him, Richard replied:

"I've no doubt it is. But it would be curious if barristers only addressed the Court while eating their dinner."

Wilfred did not approve of this flippancy.

"Do you know," he said, "I'm very tired? Turn out the light, will you? I think I shall go to sleep."

"Good-night, Wilfred."

"Good-night, Richard."

CHAPTER XXXIII

RICHARD AND GWENDOLEN

As he walked down the stairs in sight of the folding white doors that opened into the drawing-room, he felt a sharp catch at his heart. Silently his feet fell on the thick red carpet. Nearer and nearer he came to the two heavily-gilded door-knobs of the great white doors. He would place his hand on one of them. He would open the door. Instantly he would tell Gwendolen, brutally, but with a brutality which, from her point of view, would eventually seem kind, that all was at an end.

Even when his hand was on the door-knob he hesitated.

He felt a coward, a mean, despicable coward. Not only was he seized with a feeling of loathing for his action, but with deep pity for himself. With his own hand he had cut his heart from his body.

His lips were hungering for her love. Yet he was now to lie to her about that love itself.

One door was ajar. Slowly he pushed it forward.

With his long, swinging walk he strode across the parquet floor to where she was sitting on the sofa.

A look of radiant pleasure shot up to greet him. A white hand drew him to her side. But he stood erect above her, feeling in his heart infinitely small.

"Gwendolen," he said—and, for all the effort he made, there was a tremor in his voice—"Gwendolen, I'm going to tell you something horrible, something despicable. In spite of everything that you've done for me, in spite of the love for"—and here he spoke with a genuine note

in his voice—"the very deep affection I have for you, things—between us—must come to an end."

He spoke, staring far ahead of him, his eyes avoiding hers.

She threw down the evening paper petulantly.

"My dear Richard, I don't think that's funny. Your experience of the Law Courts has warped your sense of humour."

"I'm not joking!" he cried. Still he refrained from meeting her eyes. In an instant horror struck at her soul. She saw the graven face of the man, the averted aspect, the tightly clenched hands. A chill passed through her. He was speaking, obviously if not from his heart, at any rate from his mind. What the situation was she by no means understood. But she was in the presence of a man who had come to tell her a hideous determination. This was the man whom she had loved. This was her man of men, the man essential to her being. And he was telling her this astounding thing! It was not credible. But the waves of agony that passed over his face, as he stood silent by her side, proved to her that she was participating in a tragedy—a tragedy for him and for her.

As she gazed at his face, it seemed to her that this stern man with the large shoulders and the heavy, aggressive chin was a different person from the Richard, the kindly, caressing Richard to whom she had given the gold cigarette case on which was commemorated the happiest event in her life.

Some terrible change had come over this strong man. She felt that strong though he was, stern though he was, by the nature of the circumstances he stood at a disadvantage. If she knew anything of him—and she knew much—he was heartily ashamed of the words he spoke.

Now she nerved herself to fight. She was to fight for

his heart; she was to fight for her happiness. And she was fighting against him. Let *him* move. For a full minute she gazed at him with tight-shut lips. She tried by the power of her eyes to draw his face towards her.

But he stared ahead, right to the end of the room.

"Well?" she said at length, with sharp pain in her voice. She had not intended to speak, but the tension was more than she could bear.

"Well?" she repeated.

With a familiar action that she had so often admired, for it showed off to the greatest advantage his strenuous figure, he raised his right hand and slowly stroked his head. He was nerving himself for a great effort.

"I have ceased to love you," he said.

A peal of laughter was her answer.

"Richard, this is almost the first lie—I think it is quite the first lie that you have ever told me! There are certain things that should not be lied about. Our love is sacred—at any rate, to me."

Pouting, as with irritation, she threw herself on a sofa.

"I've grown tired," he answered, in a tone that he intended to be convincing, malevolent, base.

Then ashamed of so futile and feeble a lie, he rattled on:

"My dear, you have always been far too good for me. I have always worshipped you, as you know. And I thought I should be happy with you. Of course, we are happy together. But now I have discovered that I am miserably your inferior. I'm a mean, selfish hound. Let us go our different ways."

"We have no different ways," she answered in amazement, not knowing whether she was playing farce or tragedy, but fearing, fearing. "You and I——"

Then with a supreme effort, feeling that the ground was slipping away from him, that she saw that he was lying, he told her a greater, a more dastardly lie.

"I am in love with another woman."

Now here was sheer folly. She knew perfectly well that no man had ever gone to a woman and broken off a *liaison* in this fashion. The man always conceals the new love from the old. It is the duty of the old love to find out that she has been supplanted, and to bring the accusation against the lover. Enormously ridiculous though it was, it seemed to her an additional proof that she still reigned in his heart. He had heightened her anxiety with an unknown factor.

Why was he telling these preposterous lies?

Suddenly she rose from the sofa.

With a swift movement she pulled from his waistcoat pocket the gold cigarette case on which was engraved in her own handwriting the hour and the day that she first became his.

Quite calmly she said as she looked at the engraving:

"What a wonderfully long time ago it seems! Well, well," she added, as she threw it on the pink satin sofa, "you've no further use for it."

In an instant his hand was stretched out and he had recovered it.

"My God, my God!" he cried. "I shall never part with that."

Then she stood up to him, face to face, gazing up at him.

"I am at a disadvantage, Richard. Sit down. Let me talk to you. Sit down!" she commanded.

There was something imperious in the lithe figure.

He threw himself on the sofa.

"You've told me lies to-night, Richard. I don't

deserve that you should tell me lies. You are not my judge. I am not your judge." She was surprised at the calmness with which she spoke. "We are, as you've often said, partners. It's a disgraceful thing to lie to a partner. I saw you in the Law Courts do a disgraceful thing. I saw you callously—as there is a God in heaven whose laws override what you call evidence—do a disgraceful thing—a horrible thing. You don't respect a woman because she is a woman. You don't give her justice because she is a woman. But you shall give *me* justice, here and now—because I am your partner. Don't treat me as a woman—even as a woman whom you love. Love implies indissoluble friendship. But that you don't seem to understand. Treat me as you would treat a man who is honourable. Behave honourably. Now, tell me the truth. What have you got to say? But remember that if you lie to me I shall know it. Now speak."

"My dear Gwendolen," he said, and his hands were tapping one on the other; he did not dare to meet her eyes.

"Don't you speak to me like that. Haven't you the courage to look me in the face?"

He raised his eyes, but only for a second.

"I can't look you in the face. I'm doing a hell of a thing."

"Then," she said, "do it in your own way." Fighting for her life, and fighting bitterly, she added, "You ought to know how to do that sort of thing."

Anxious to hear the worst he had to say, aware that the air was heavy with disaster, she almost had her hand upon his throat to tear the words out of his heart. There was in her face the look of the tigress fighting for her young, that he had only seen once before.

"Go on!" she said, thrusting her face towards him in the silence of the night.

There was in her mind some sort of triumph at the sight of this shrewd cross-examiner, this master of eloquence, cowering before her, not daring to raise his eyes to her face.

At last he spoke. The greater the brute he should appear to her, the more callous, the more contemptible, the less cruel he felt would be the blow to her. Quite deliberately he said:

"My love for you is fatal to my career. I'm going to give you up!"

He could hear the rustle of her skirts as she staggered back. A little stifled cry of despair came from her lips. That was all.

The silence was intolerable. He hesitated to look up.

At last he raised his eyes, and then he saw the ruin he had wrought.

The woman was the epitome of hopeless pain. Her eyes stared vacantly. Her hands were clasped on her breast. Her whole body drooped in her despair. Her frame swayed to and fro. Her eyes were closed. She was on the point of fainting.

He rushed to her side.

Instantly she recovered her self-possession.

"Don't touch me! Don't dare to touch me! Because you're a coward, I'm not weak." And then, with bitter sarcasm, she added: "Yes, you told one truth to-night. You said that you were a mean hound. You are a mean hound!"

"My darling Gwendolen——"

She waved his words aside.

"Stop! I want to think. I am beginning to understand. It is a horrible thing to understand. But I am—

beginning. Yes, I begin to see. You have made my body—yes, my body—your stepping-stone. You have had what you wanted of me, all the pleasure I could give, and all the help I could offer. You have found that it's better to be a lawyer than to be a lover. Yes, I see, Richard; lawyers are knighted, lovers are not. Oh, it's no good protesting. You're just as contemptible as your brother—every bit."

"Gwendolen, don't be so cruel to me! You know that what you are saying is unfair."

In his own mind he was surprised at her behaviour. She should have been hysterical at the shock. He saw that the shock had been terrible. And yet she retained her self-composure. A woman who at such a moment retained her self-composure could not, he tried to persuade himself, truly love. In spite of his acute knowledge of her temperament, he did not know that, even to the last, she would be a fighter; that it was not until she had exhausted every weapon with which she could struggle to regain him that she would lose control over her brain.

"I am not unfair," she said. "I'm only looking at things calmly and deliberately. Because you think, oh, Richard, unwise in your generation, that it is a prudent thing for you to—'chuck' is a suitable name for that sort of action—to 'chuck' me, it does not follow that you are right. Now, answer me truly."

She spoke breathlessly, fiercely. "Answer me truly. Will you be happy without me?"

"My God, I shall be wretched without you!"

"I know I shall be wretched without you. Because I have only you. You've got your work, you see. I suppose that never occurred to you. You have not thought of me in this calculation, have you?"

"Thought?" He shot his head forward. "Thought, my darling?"

"Oh, it's no good calling me your darling. I'm not your darling. You desert me. And tell me for what, pray? Be quite candid, Richard; I should like to know my rival. What can I do to prevent you from flinging yourself into my rival's arms?"

And then he told her, and he was very much ashamed as he told her the story of how the Lord Chancellor refused to make him a K. C.

"What a wonderful man Lashbridge is!" she said reflectively.

"What the deuce has Lashbridge got to do with it?" asked Richard.

"I suppose," she said, "that the puppets do not always see who is pulling the strings. Doesn't it strike you as somewhat curious that Lashbridge should be instrumental in getting you to apply for silk? Does it not seem strange that the Chancellor, who refuses you silk, should be a friend of Lashbridge? Perhaps you have forgotten the day when we were at the Carlton and they were lunching together?"

This was a new light to Richard. It beat on his eyes and made him blink.

"Good heavens!" he exclaimed.

"Well?" she asked.

He knew what was in her mind. He knew the question that was flying from her eyes.

"Won't you feel somewhat of a fool if Lashbridge succeeds in separating you from me?"

He felt a fool. He cursed Lashbridge. But, after all, that astute peer had only precipitated the climax. His action was really irrelevant in the drama of his life.

She sounded the depths of what she considered his villainy, his cupidity, and his cowardice.

"Don't let us mince words, Richard. Let us quite understand the situation. I, for one, am entitled to understand it.. Do you love me as much as ever?" She spoke with the calmness of despair.

"I love you more than ever."

"No other woman has come into your life?"

"There will never be any other woman in my life."

"And yet you can't wait two or three years for me?"

"It is absolutely vital that I become a K. C. now."

"And the course you propose is never to see me again?"

"Never, Heaven help me, to see you again!"

"And it will be painful to you, Richard?"

"It will hurt like——" He could not find a comparison.

"And all this you will do in order to get on in your profession? In order to have more opportunities of treating women as you treated that poor little woman in the witness-box?"

He shrugged his shoulders in refutation.

"Do you know that I'm suffering more than she? I am suffering more than I ever believed it could be given to a human being to suffer. Beside the black darkness of my grief, all other sorrows seem small. That little woman who suffered at your hands seems to me a happy little woman. And, do you know," she spoke quietly, weighing her words, "that one of these reasons that prevent me from going mad—yes, mad, Richard—is that I know you're doing the right thing—are behaving just in the way that you ought to behave—that I would have expected you to behave. This is the result of common sense. You are weighing me in the balance against your profession, and you are deciding against me. But do you

know the sentence you are pronouncing? You are pronouncing a sentence of death. Yes, of death," she said. "I can't exist without you. Oh, I know women have said this hundreds of times before! But I very much doubt if any woman who has heard her doom as I have heard it to-night—has listened to it as calmly as I have. Of course, you must understand that I feel bitterly the terrible insult of what you say. I feel that all the love I have wasted on you all these years has been in vain—that I count for nothing. Mind you, I shall think of this until my death. I am a wounded, broken creature. But, Richard, I am not dead yet. I know that you are not worth loving. I know that no self-respecting woman would love you after what you have said. But," she turned rapidly, and seized him by the shoulders; there was almost the strength of iron in the little fingers, "you are my Richard—you are my Richard!"

She sank back, staring at him. Her frame quivered, and the light glittered on the moving spangles of her dress.

Suddenly she stood erect. A wave, as it were, of inspiration passed over her face, an expression came into her eyes almost of hideous determination.

"Do you hear anything?" she said. "I think Wilfred is calling me."

She went to the door.

Left alone, he sat with his eyes rivetted to the carpet.

Then, for a reason which he could never afterwards explain, vaguely, purposelessly, he got up and stumbled after her upstairs.

When he reached the half-open door of Wilfred's room he suddenly asked himself why he had come there. He scarcely remembered having climbed the stairs. He stood aimlessly gazing into the room.

On the bed lay Wilfred, his face lighted by an electric lamp at his side, his mouth contorted into a wry movement as he placed an empty glass on the bed-table.

At the distant end of the room Gwendolen replaced a medicine bottle, which of the many bottles on the washhand-stand her figure prevented him from seeing. On her face, as she turned, was an expression that Richard would never forget. It was an expression in which horror, determination, and—something else were equally depicted.

The light in that ill-omened chamber was dim. In his brain, too, was dimness—lit up by one lurid suspicion. He did not know whether she could see him.

Somehow he made his way back to the drawing-room. There he flung himself into a chair and buried his face in his hands, as if to shut out a terrible sight.

CHAPTER XXXIV

THE UTILITY OF DR. PLAGDEN

In the silence he listened to the ticking of the clock, as he had listened to the ticking of the clock on the night of Billy's death. But to-night he felt as Billy must have felt; his hands were cold and clammy.

What had happened in that room upstairs? Had anything happened at all? Why that look of horror on Gwendolen's face? Why the stealthy movement with the white hand on the green bottle?

He felt sure it was a green one.

He tried to satisfy himself that she had replaced the bottle on the marble slab naturally.

But there was the look of horror.

Suppose she had accidentally given him the wrong medicine! Ah! If she had discovered it, by now she would have roused the house.

The minutes were passing; the clock was ticking.

Again, did she know? Had she seen him as he stood by the door?

A shrewd judge of character, a man who in his profession had dealt with criminals, who was familiar with the adjuncts of crime and all its details, he felt that when he saw her again he would know instinctively by her features what part she had played in——

“Good Heavens! What a fool he was!”

He felt alarm for himself. Where had his judgment gone to? What manner of man was he? On this absurd evidence to jump at such a conclusion! . . . even for a moment! Again and again he wiped his forehead.

He walked to the looking-glass and examined his face. It seemed to him a very evil face. It seemed to him that lines of cruelty were carved on his face, that his chin stuck out more aggressively than ever.

"Have I not done the woman enough harm," he said, "without suspecting her of anything so grotesque as this?"

At that moment he heard the rustle of her gown on the stairs.

He fixed his eyes on the doors, wondering how they would open, and how she would enter.

She entered with sheer terror upon her face. Her eyes stared straight from under her curved eyebrows—her lips were white, her skin was waxen.

She stood still with her hand on the door-knob.

Though she was half the length of the room away from him, though she spoke in a whisper, the sound travelled directly to him.

"Wilfred is dead."

"Dead!" he echoed.

Was she going to say no more than that?

"Wilfred is dead," she repeated.

In what manner of tone had she said those words? Was this evidence of guilt or innocence? he asked himself. Was she merely describing a horrible thing that had happened? That was all he could gather from her voice.

"Here am I," he thought, "probably in the presence of a murderess. It is possible that she has murdered that man. If she is guilty, she will betray herself. Let her speak."

He did not move towards her. He stood deliberately still.

She was the actress. He was the spectator.

"Don't glare at me like that," she cried. "Wilfred is dead. Don't you understand? Dead in the room upstairs."

In one's heart, as in one's body, it is not possible to suffer two agonies at the same moment. She did not love Wilfred. She hated Wilfred. Wilfred was dead.

Had he died a natural death, the effect, beyond causing such slight sorrow as comes to one on the death of a constant companion, even if that constant companion's society is not a source of pleasure, must have been a relief to Gwendolen. He would not expect Wilfred's decease to overwhelm her with sorrow. He himself had just dealt her a terrible blow, by the side of which her widowhood was as nothing. Actually, Wilfred's death solved the question between them—provided he had died a natural death.

She was staring at him wild-eyed, but she was self-controlled.

When he had told her that the end of their love was at hand she had possessed marvellous self-control.

From her demeanour he could gather nothing definite. He could only realize the horror of her situation.

"Look here," he said abruptly. "Wilfred has had no doctor." He walked towards her and stared into her face. "There will have to be an inquest."

She understood what that meant.

"*Must* there be an inquest?" she asked. And she only expressed the natural repugnance that is felt by all against the desecration of the dead.

"Oh, can't you stop *that*? Can't you arrange that there is no inquest?"

"What do you think he died of?"

"Medicine," she answered.

"What medicine?"

"Not one particular medicine, but all the medicines. He used to take an enormous number of medicines."

"What did you give him last?"

"I don't know. He pointed it out to me when I went upstairs. It was something in a green bottle."

"Gwendolen, it is possible that what you gave him in that green bottle killed him. I want to point out to you that if there is an inquest—and there must be—your position will be serious."

"Richard," she said, "you have sacrificed me to your profession. I suppose you have sufficient influence with somebody in the right quarter—I don't know what the right quarter is—to make an inquest unnecessary."

He shrugged his shoulders.

"I can't. Did you see me looking into the room when you were putting the medicine-bottle back?"

She hesitated.

"I'm not sure. I thought I saw somebody. Was it you?"

He repeated the question to himself, "I'm not sure. I thought I saw somebody. Was it you?"

This answer, like all her others, was consistent with innocence as well as with guilt. But if she was a guilty woman, she was truly a marvellous actress. If she was an innocent woman, she seemed to realise the peril in which she stood. Suppose there was an inquest! Suppose poison was found in his body! Suspicion would point directly to Gwendolen. His own evidence would be very damning to Gwendolen—not altogether creditable to himself. But no one knew that he was in a position to give evidence. He would never give evidence. Could he stand up in the witness-box at the Old Bailey and tell a story that might be fatal to the woman he loved? Fatal, even though she were innocent. He shuddered. Good

Heavens! What was he doing? Gwendolen was in dire peril. Something must be done, here and now. There must be no inquest. Guilty or innocent, she should never undergo the tortures of a trial for murder. But how could an inquest be avoided?

"Quick," he said. "How many servants have you in the house? What's the time?"

He looked at the clock. It was a quarter past ten.

"There are five servants in the house," she answered.

"Where do they sleep?"

"Upstairs."

"And the footman?"

"In the basement. I told you that Younghusband had gone."

Her eyes were rivetted on his lips.

He had conceived a plan. He went to the bell and rang it.

"When John comes up, tell him to bring whiskey and soda, and then tell him that he can go to bed. What's it matter about reputations now? There are more serious things in the world than the loss of a reputation."

When John entered, he found Mrs. Ainslie sitting, to all appearance, calmly on the sofa, and Richard walking up and down.

Gwendolen ordered the whiskey and soda. There was silence till the footman returned.

Then Richard said:

"Go up and sit with your husband. Go up and sit in his bedroom."

Richard went down to the library.

He went to the telephone.

"Are you Dr. Plagden? . . . I am Richard Meyville. . . . This is a matter of life and death. . . . Something quite out of your line. . . . It is not what you think.

I want you to come round to 118 Green Street. Can you come now? It will take you five minutes. But you must walk. . . . I will be watching for you from the dining-room window, and I will open the door."

In five minutes, from the darkness of the dining-room he saw through the blinds the bustling figure of Dr. Plagden walking rapidly along.

He stole to the front door and opened it silently. The Doctor entered. In a professional manner he smiled at Richard. Then he took off his hat, and placed it on the sixteenth-century chest of drawers. The tall frame of the barrister towered above him. He waited for Richard to speak.

"Come up to the drawing-room. You can leave your bag here," said Richard in a whisper.

Silently they walked up the stairs into the brilliantly-lighted room.

"This is a very serious matter, Doctor Plagden. I'm going to ask you a great favor. You're not running any risk. I want you to understand that you're not running any risk."

The quick, nervous manner in which he spoke gave the lie to the words he uttered. Plagden seemed to be on his guard.

"My dear Mr. Meyville," he said, rubbing his fat white hands together, "I'm under a very great obligation to you——"

Richard interposed:

"I'm aware of that. Years ago, I forget how many, I defended you at Rochester Row Police Court. You were then an obscure practitioner in Maida Vale. You are now making many thousands a year in Grosvenor Street."

The keen face of the barrister was peering down into

the somewhat flabby, rubicund face of a man who looked more like a successful farmer than an eminent ladies' doctor.

Dr. Plagden took three steps forward, placing his hands behind his back.

"Really, Mr. Meyville, it is unnecessary to remind me of that. Tell me what you want."

"I will tell you," was the answer, "exactly so much as you need know."

"Go on."

"By the bye, you don't know in whose house you are, do you?"

Dr. Plagden nodded an affirmative, threw back his shiny broadcloth coat, and placed his hands in his pockets as though prepared for the worst.

"Well," he said, "I gathered from your telephone message—"

Richard stopped him.

"Mr. Ainslie is dead. He is lying dead upstairs—"

The Doctor threw a look of surprise at him:

"Mr. Ainslie—"

"Mr. Ainslie was a drug-fiend. He lived almost entirely on medicines and never called in a doctor, and he has dosed himself to death. The story will be this: His wife went to see him shortly after ten to-night, and found him dying, as she thought. I telephoned you to come round, and you were present at his death. Is there anything the matter with that?"

"That's all right. It would be all right," answered Plagden, "if it were any other doctor but myself. You know I'm a very unusual sort of person to call in for a dying—man."

Richard smiled.

"You can't be suspected. It's impossible, absolutely

impossible. Mind you, I take a very keen interest in this thing."

"Precisely."

"I understand. But you must play your part for all you're worth. It must be known that you were in the house. You're a prominent barrister, and——"

"I don't think the Treasury would take any steps. You needn't worry about that."

"Yes, I think it's a good story."

"Does it break down anywhere, from your point of view?" asked Richard.

"I can't say that it does," answered Plagden, after reflection. Then he repeated: "The servants have all gone to bed. You, as an old friend of the family, have telephoned to me because I'm the nearest doctor you know. You in your anxiety wait for me at the door. Yes. I understand."

"Anything else, Doctor?"

"Ring up the servants. Tell them their master is very ill."

* * * * *

"Now we will go upstairs," said Richard.

He opened Wilfred's bedroom door, and found Gwen-dolen sitting by the bed, her face resting on her palms, her elbows on the foot of the bed. She was staring, not at the dead man, but at a photograph of Richard on the mantelpiece.

CHAPTER XXXV

THE DEFENCE OF GABRIELLE LÉVI

DAY dawned on Richard lying prostrate on his sofa in Hay Hill; his eyes, encircled with deep brown lines, glared at the rays of light creeping through the blinds. Hour after hour he had spent reconstructing the scene in Wilfred's bedroom.

In his mind he had no doubt as to Gwendolen's guilt. She had murdered her husband.

Deliberately, though on the spur of the moment, she had administered poison to him. What that poison was would never be known.

Owing to his influence over Plagden, an inquest would be avoided.

What did Plagden think of the matter? Plagden could know nothing, for certain. Plagden might suspect. Plagden could not *know*.

Assume that Wilfred had died from poison. He was in the habit of taking poison. Gwendolen might have given him—innocently—an overdose. He felt that it would be useless for him to interview the doctor on the subject. Whatever his view was, it would not be conclusive to Richard. And as to Gwendolen! To her he could put no question.

In the grey dawn he understood the hideous sentence he was passing upon himself. If she were wiped out from his life what, in God's name, was there to live for? What did his profession matter now? The best work that a man does is always done for the sake of a woman. If it be

not for a definite woman, it is done in the hope that some day that work will win for him the ideal of his heart. Richard had found his ideal. Had his ideal blood-stained hands?

He rose wearily from the sofa, and walked languidly to the mantelpiece.

His watch had stopped. It was eight o'clock. Then he fell back into the arm-chair.

There his man found him shortly afterwards.

He was awakened by the scared face of the servant and a husky whisper:

"Oh, sir, I thought you were dead!"

There was no answer in the blank eyes.

"Can I get you anything, sir?"

"What's the time?"

"Getting on for half-past eight, sir."

"Get me a brandy and soda, half brandy and half soda. What day of the week is it?" Without waiting for a reply, he said, "I've got to do something to-day. I've got some work on to-day, haven't I?"

"I don't know, sir," answered the startled man. "I suppose you've got to go down to the Temple, as usual, if you're well enough, but—"

"Do you know, Andrews," said Richard, raising himself and gripping the arms of his chair, "my memory seems to have gone."

"You're looking very ill, sir."

Now Andrews, who had been in the service of many brilliant young men, had considerable experience of the results of dissipation. But in spite of the fact that appearances were terribly against Richard, his servant saw that his prostration was the result of a terrible disaster.

Suddenly Richard sprang at him.

"Andrews," he said, "you're a man of the world.

If you were in love with a woman, and she murdered her husband, quick—say—would you marry her?"

Andrews shrank back. Was his master mad, he asked himself? There was a glitter in his eyes that was scarcely sane.

Andrews temporised.

"I can't very well imagine myself being in love with a married lady, sir. But if I was in love with a married lady and she murdered her husband, well, I don't know, sir, what I should do."

Richard threw himself back in the chair:

"God, what a fool I am!" he said. "I'm talking nonsense."

"Yes, sir," assented Andrews.

But he seemed interested in the strange problem propounded by his master.

"There are many people who naturally would not like to marry a woman who had murdered her first husband. But, I think, sir, the second husband would be quite safe. I don't suppose that it often happens that a woman murders two husbands."

"Pull up the blinds, Andrews. What the devil do I look like?"

"Excuse my saying so, sir, but you're looking very ill, and you certainly do, if you'll excuse me saying so, sir, act uncommon queer." Suddenly he said: "Aren't you defending the French murderess at the Old Bailey to-day, sir?"

"Good heavens! Am I? I seem to have forgotten everything that happened before last night."

"Yes, sir, I know you are, now I come to think of it. There is a picture of you alongside of the woman in this morning's *Mirror*. The *Mirror* is my paper you know, sir," he explained.

"Quick, get me that brandy."

When Andrews had gone, he went to the mirror.

"I'm ghastly pale, and I'm dog-tired. I haven't a muscle in my legs. How the devil am I to talk to a jury to-day?"

And yet, at 10.30 that morning would begin a tragic struggle for life and death. He was in no fit state to appear for Gabrielle Lévi, and his junior was entirely incapable of performing that uphill task. No doubt, John could arrange with Kemble, who was prosecuting, to have the case adjourned. But how could he remain that entire day alone in his flat? He couldn't face his own thoughts. If he could go down to the Old Bailey, and talk and talk until he died—that would be a fitting termination to his career. If he could have died as he stood looking through half-closed eyes at his reflection, he would have desired that death.

When Andrews returned, he took the brandy and soda from the tray.

It revived him, and shortly afterwards he staggered to the bathroom. He cut himself, shaving. His hands were trembling and damp. He felt that he was on the verge of a fever. Then he jumped into a cab and drove to a hairdresser's in Bond Street, where he was properly shaved and shampooed. Then he thought he would walk to the Temple. But he was too nervous to walk. Again he got into a cab and drove down.

He found John in his room.

John stared at him, without concealing his alarm.

"Something has happened, sir," he said instantly. He did not make the error of assuming that Richard was ill. "What is it, sir?"

But Richard did not answer.

"It isn't Mrs.—" But he got no further.

"What do you mean?"

John made a great effort.

"It's all over the Temple, sir, that the Chancellor has refused you silk because of—"

"Go on," said Richard, in a dry voice.

"Because of—Mrs. Ainslie."

"Mr. Ainslie," answered Richard, "is dead."

The tone prohibited further conversation.

There were fifteen questions on the tip of John's tongue, now that he had dared to put the first. But he did not venture to put one of them.

At last Richard spoke:

"I've got to defend this woman at the Old Bailey."

"You're not in a fit state, sir. I can run up to Mr. Kemble's clerk and have the case adjourned."

"You'll do nothing of the sort. I'll defend the woman, if I die for it."

He felt that if he threw himself at the storm and stress of the great fight, he would find in this well-nigh impossible task a few hours' oblivion from his agony. He would like to toil at that case until his strength was exhausted; until sleep or death, or drink or morphia came.

"I must do this case," he said. "I don't think I shall do it very well. I've got to do it, John. And, my God!" he thundered, "I will do it well!"

He rose.

"He will look worse with his wig on," reflected the clerk, as they strode out together into Essex Court.

In the cold, crisp morning air they walked along Fleet Street.

Suddenly Richard went into a newspaper shop and, to his clerk's surprise, purchased a copy of the *Daily Mirror*.

"She is rather pretty," he said absent-mindedly, as he left the paper on the counter.

"Who is, sir?" inquired John in surprise.

"Gabrielle Lévi," he answered. "Murderesses," he added, "are nearly always pretty. I suppose the most beautiful women are always bad."

"If you ask me, sir, and—mind you—I have been particularly fortunate in my own experience, all women are wrong 'uns, wrong 'uns; wrong from A to Z."

"I suppose they are," replied Richard grimly. "Now we will get into a cab."

At the Old Bailey, he threw all his energy into the defence of the murderess. He fought for her as he would have fought for Gwendolen. He was aggressive, even unmannerly. He turned on Kemble and rent him. Every now and then the little barrister sitting next to him peered at him curiously out of the corner of his eye. "What the dickens is the matter with Meyville?" he asked himself.

He himself had opened for the prosecution, asking only for a verdict of manslaughter. It had been a kindly, judicial opening. And yet Richard had alluded to it in his cross-examination as violent and unfair.

Little Kemble was puzzled.

"Why should he take such a vast and apparently personal interest in the defendant?"

There were few witnesses to call; the case was in a nutshell. Kemble had whispered to Richard: "Are you going to put the prisoner in the box?"

Richard had cursed him; had told him to mind his own business.

"Very well," Kemble had answered.

Richard's speech, a masterpiece of eloquence, of furious, impassioned pleading, astounded the court. He had been able to extract little evidence of a favourable nature from the witnesses for the prosecution. But these molehills he made into mountains. He explained to the jury the vast

responsibility he took upon his shoulders by not placing the prisoner in the box. He told them he gladly took that responsibility, that had he placed her in the witness-box he would have her death upon his conscience. "Here was a woman," he said, "a stranger, being tried for her life. She had been in prison for weeks. The man she loved, the hideous monster whom she loved, who had lived upon her shame, was dead. After the agony of these weeks in prison, in what condition was she to stand up in that box and fight against the wits of the most brilliant cross-examiner at the English Bar? What chance had she, a Frenchwoman, speaking English but little, what chance had she against a man like Kemble? "Why," he cried, "If I myself were accused of murder, do you think that I, even with my knowledge of the law, such as it is, after weeks of terrible anguish, would be in a fit state to fight against the merciless acumen of my learned friend? The whole of his brilliant career he has devoted to the study of the weaknesses of people on trial. I should be a criminal did I allow Gabrielle Lévi to place herself at the mercy of that ruthless brain."

On and on he went, gradually confusing the issue until it appeared to the mystified jury that it was the Prisoners' Evidence Act that was on its trial and not the woman in the dock. By his eloquence, he reduced her to tears. A fine-looking woman, with a square white face and huge pathetic eyes, she sobbed at the burning words that came from his lips.

Suddenly the judge interrupted.

"Gabrielle," he said.

"I beg your pardon, my lord."

"I only reminded you that the prisoner's name is Gabrielle. Several times you have called her Gwendolen."

A sudden change came over Richard. He stood for a moment erect, seeking speech. Then his eyes vaguely wandered to the dock.

Two or three times he began to speak:

"My lord—my lord—"

Then his frame shook. He had come to the end of his speech, but he could not end it. There was nothing more to say, except to add the peroration, but practically his whole speech had been peroration.

The last time he said "My lord," his voice, through dry lips, was scarcely audible.

Kemble rose to support him. But he was too late. His gaunt body fell heavily forward across the desk.

* * * * *

When he recovered consciousness in the robing-room, he asked the doctor bending over him what was the verdict.

"Not guilty on all counts."

Then he swooned again.

CHAPTER XXXVI

THE FUNERAL

OBVIOUSLY Richard must attend the funeral. Wilfred had been an old friend of his, and although he had racked his brain for reasons that might excuse his attendance, a certain insuperable instinct compelled him to go to Green Street.

The demeanour of Gwendolen would be of great importance. By her manner he felt that he would be able to arrive at a sure conclusion with regard to her innocence or guilt in the matter of her husband's death. Although he had in his own mind decided that Wilfred's death had been due to her, yet a certain craving possessed him to see her in a moment of extraordinary difficulty.

Guilty she was beyond doubt. But how would she wear her air of innocence?

In the drawing-room he found Mrs. Paxton-Pryce, various relatives, complete strangers to him, and Lashbridge. In the middle of a sympathetic crowd was Gwendolen. Instantly on that fair face he believed that he saw an ideal representation of Remorse fleeing from Crime.

Her black-clad figure rose to meet him.

He had a presentiment that when he gripped her hand the touch of it would prove beyond all possibility of speculation her guilt.

But the touch proved nothing.

She had changed in no degree. If she were a murderess now, she had always been a murderess. If ever she had

been a white-souled woman, she was a white-souled woman now.

The women, who had come by way of questioning her, were talking nonsense; they were talking nonsense in the house of tragedy. A grief that is a grief is a topic too sacred for words. A smile of cynicism flitted over his drawn lips.

"These women are sympathising with a woman because she has effected her purpose," he thought.

Lashbridge laid a hand upon his shoulder.

"What did you say to her?" he asked.

"I didn't say anything. What could I say?"

Then, putting the question directly to the other:

"What did you say?"

"I congratulated her."

"On what, may I ask?" inquired Richard.

"She understood."

"I don't understand," he said coldly.

Lashbridge drew him aside.

"I suppose you're going to marry her, aren't you?"

"What the devil has that to do with you?"

"Oh, nothing, nothing," he answered smiling. "Since you ask so pointedly, it has nothing to do with—me. But it has a great deal to do with you. You're in a deuced bad temper. And, by gad! you're looking devilish ill."

"Telling a man that he's looking ill never makes him feel any better," replied the other.

"Do you know, Richard, that I think you're paying a very big price for your success. Every success is bought at a huge price. But you're paying more than you need. A year ago you were a young-looking man; you were in love, you were happy, and you had a future before you. Now you've got your future, and you look as old as a judge—and nothing ever looks as old as a judge."

Suddenly he added: "Mrs. Paxton-Pryce is a very unpleasant woman. She takes rather an interest in me. I think it is probably—and I'm not saying this out of vanity—because I'm a peer. Do you know that if ever it happens—and, thank heavens, it happens very rarely—that I am introduced to a Bayswater woman I have an unpleasant thrill? And, mind you, all the Bayswater people don't live in Bayswater. I've come across people in Kensington, and even in Mayfair, who are pure, pure Bayswater. The death of Wilfred is very sad."

Richard could not understand what—if anything—the man was driving at.

"When will you be married? I suppose you'll wait a year. I shouldn't have said 'wait' a year; but I suppose you won't be married for a year?"

Richard looked earnestly at him. Then he said a thing which surprised him even as the words came from his lips. It seemed to him incredible that he was uttering them.

"I'm not going to marry her. But I see no reason why you shouldn't. I am very, very much indebted to you for all your kindness to me, for all the efforts you made towards helping me, and especially in the matter of the Great Southern Railway."

The tone in which he spoke was so clear, so contemptuous, that it was as a deliberate blow in Lashbridge's face. It was an insult and, at the same time, a promise of happiness unhopd for. The blow he scarcely resented.

"Do you seriously mean to say that you're not going to marry her?" he enquired, with eager surprise.

"One does not say a thing of that sort unless one means it seriously. I shall never marry Mrs. Ainslie."

For some seconds the men stood looking intently at each

other. "Was it possible," thought Lashbridge, "that the barrister meant what he said?"

Here was Gwendolen with an income of at least £20,000 a year, with her beauty intact, with her devotion notorious. And Richard thrust Gwendolen aside! What could there be behind this? True, Richard was looking terribly ill. He was worn and nervous. But he had loved the woman for many years. He had just achieved a colossal, almost unexampled triumph. He was in a position to do anything at the Bar, and he was doing most things. Here was a man who was strenuously fighting his way to the high places of the world. For what possible reason could he have decided not to marry Gwendolen?

Then Lashbridge did a thing that he never could have anticipated—a thing that he never afterwards regarded as characteristic of himself. He took Richard's arm, and drew him towards himself until their faces met.

"Look here," he said in a whisper, "you and I are in love with the same woman. That good point is about the only point we have in common. She worships you. She will never care for me—in that way. If I had met her first, I believe I could have made her love me. But you have met her, and she will love you to the end!" Tightening his grip, he said: "You are a blackguard if you don't marry her."

"You use the word 'blackguard'," said Richard. "It is hardly the word to use."

Though he had complete control of his voice, and the words came with such intensity that a blow seemed bound to follow, yet, as Lashbridge looked in his face, his expression was out of keeping with his speech. There was no fire in his eyes; there was a quiver about his mouth.

"Look here!" said Richard suddenly. "I'm never

going to see her after to-day. She likes you. She's a woman who must be loved. She is a woman who deserves—well, God knows what! She could get on well with you, and she's got to be married to somebody—to somebody. *Qui a aimé aimera*. You marry her, Lashbridge."

"You're the most extraordinary person I've ever met," exclaimed the other.

"You're quite wrong there," replied Richard. "Gwendolen is the most extraordinary person you've ever met."

* * * * *

Cold and damp and grey.

The funeral procession, almost comic in its assumption of tragedy, proceeded with unconvincing dignity towards Kensal Green. Lashbridge took Richard in his *limousine*. In the heart of each man was the same question: "What is Gwendolen thinking about?"

Richard pictured her silent in calm dignity sitting motionless by her mother's side.

Lashbridge, completely mystified by the situation, hoped against hope that she was giving him a single thought.

Slowly the black snake of woe turned into Westbourne Terrace from the Bayswater Road.

Gwendolen, in very truth, was in a delirium of happiness. It gave her almost acute pleasure to notice any sign of joy on the face of a passer-by. But on that grim, dark day traces of merriment were indeed hard to find. She only saw pinched faces and blue lips. It was a day of death; the living seemed moribund. In front of a house with a bright red door were a man and his wife, who had returned from their ride in the Park. He, a military, good-looking man, was laughing into the eyes of a handsome woman full of life. "There, indeed, is happiness!" she said to herself. And then there floated

before her mind the faces of Richard and herself. Some day they, too, would return from the Park in the morning, aglow with the pleasure of the ride. And just in this way he would look into her eyes. How proud would she be of his admiration! How proud she would be to be admired by so strong a man! That man who, by the power of his eloquence, could snatch the guilty from the jaws of death; that strong, grim man, tender only to her—only to her.

A smile flitted about her lips. Nothing could come between them. She had devoted her life to him. Ever since she had met him she had done all in her power—for him.

And now she looked confidently forward to her reward. She thought nothing of the stark, cold man lying in the hearse in front of her.

CHAPTER XXXVII

ILLNESS

ON the evening of that day Gwendolen was alone in the drawing-room.

Seated in front of the fire, she felt no sense of warmth. It seemed to her as though the windows were open and that a cold breath passed to her bones. With a quivering hand she poked the fire. Suddenly she felt a curious shiver, more like ice than any sensation she had felt before. It seemed as though a piece of ice had been dropped down the back of her dress.

It dawned upon her that she had got a chill when standing by her husband's grave.

What a fool she had been to go! Why had she ever gone to the funeral? Yet she was satisfied in her own mind that she should have gone to it.

It was half-past nine.

She rang for tea. But it did not warm her shivering body, unnaturally cold. It struck her that a good night's rest might put her right.

But there was no good night's rest for her. She slept uneasily for half-hours at a time, and woke unrefreshed in the morning.

Leah, assiduous and conciliatory, dressed her with attentions that were more irksome than neglect.

Throughout the morning there was a dull, aching pain in her right side. She had a presentiment of coming illness. The presentiment oppressed her, though she tried to convince herself that she was only suffering from a trifling chill.

Wearily enough she received that afternoon a visit from her solicitor. But it was beyond her power to take any interest in his statements. She gathered only, and without the slightest feeling of pleasure, that, financially, everything was extremely well with her.

Early that night she went to bed.

Leah, in the morning, urged her to send for a doctor. But she, a woman who had never been seriously ill, had such confidence in her physical strength that she felt determined to thrust off the black terror that possessed her.

Leah, conscious that she was giving good advice, chided her mistress almost pettishly for her refusal.

Most of the next day she spent lying on the sofa in intense discomfort. Every hour or so she telephoned to Richard, but she never got nearer to him than John.

The unfailing answer always was:

"Mr. Meyville is out."

"Will you tell him that I'm very ill, and that I want him to come and see me at once?"

"I will give him your message, madam."

But somehow she had little confidence in John. She knew he was hostile.

At half-past six she rang up again.

This time the clerk answered that Mr. Meyville had gone.

Then she rang him up at Hay Hill, and his manservant replied that he was dining out, dressing at his club.

She thought it all very curious.

She tried to read, but could not.

Why didn't Richard come? His behaviour was monstrous.

She walked to the mirror and looked at herself. Her

eyes were very bright, and her face seemed rather drawn and pale. She looked terribly ill, she thought. And yet the pain she suffered was not such as to warrant that strange glitter in her eyes, that pallor of her cheeks. But the act of walking was anguish. Six times at least she rang up Richard from her bed that night.

Sudden horror seized her as she realised that he must have deliberately taken off the receiver; that he intended to cut himself off from communication with her. She started up in bed with staring eyes and met the horror of the idea.

Soaked with perspiration, she lay back on her pillow, and great sobs shook her frame for a period that seemed hours, leaving her limp and exhausted. She lay with her face buried in her hands, her body convulsively pressing upon the sheets. He had forsaken her—after all she had done. It was the cruelty of a coward. He didn't dare to say that he had forsaken her; he simply cut her out of his life.

She would dress and go to his rooms. She would dress at once. What was the time? It was five o'clock.

And still the aching continued. It seemed that her bones, shivering and rasping, were struggling to get away from the flesh.

Five o'clock! Good heavens! She must wait hours before she could get up! Would she be able to get up? How if she were dying? At the thought she remained still and frightened. Would the day never come? This was not death. This—and she faced the fact—was the beginning of fearful suffering. A horrible illness was threatening her. She turned on the light and faced the situation. It was vital for her to be well now. In fury she beat the pillow with her clenched hands. Of all

moments in her life this was the least suitable for an illness.

"Richard, Richard!" she cried, "come to me!"

There was he, no distance off, in bed asleep.

Why couldn't she communicate with him? The telephone, that had so often brought them together, seemed now to place them further apart. Fiercely she rang at the machine. But the same answer came back, "We can't make them hear, madam."

Then, maddened by the recollection of many delirious conversations with him, of words of love, words of passion, words of exquisite intimacy that had reached her in that bed, the tears came. But tears brought no relief. She scarcely knew that she was crying. But she knew that she was in terrible agony. A peculiar sharp and gnawing pain held her in its grip.

At eight o'clock Leah, inquisitively kind, brought her a cup of tea.

"Madame," she said firmly, "must see a doctor immediately."

"Yes, yes," she answered. "But who?" For years she had not seen a doctor. Suddenly the thought of Doctor Onslowe-Bond occurred to her, the family doctor of the Paxton-Pryces. Yes, she would see Onslowe-Bond. She telephoned to him, and waited in a kind of dull and patient anxiety for his arrival.

At ten o'clock he came, a man of military appearance, with a black moustache and a bald head. He looked more like a major than a medical man.

Earnestly and with accuracy and restraint, wonderful in a woman, she described her symptoms.

He took her temperature, and she saw by the expression in his eyes that he regarded her case as grave.

"Tell me exactly what's the matter?" she asked.

"It's a feverish chill, Gwendolen, that's all. Oh, I beg your pardon," he added, a smile breaking out on his face; "that takes us many years back, doesn't it?"

He wrote a prescription, and said he would return later.

After two doses of the medicine her pain grew less. To her thinking, the matter appeared less serious, and for a few hours she was almost hopeful.

As a matter of fact, two strong doses of phenacetin had reduced her temperature; but only for the time. This made her fancy she was better.

When Onslowe-Bond returned in the evening he seemed agreeably surprised at the improvement, called her a "marvel," and said that she yielded most satisfactorily to treatment.

"You'll be all right in a day or two, my dear Mrs. Ainslie. I think I was a little alarmed at your temperature when I found it so high, but it's going down nicely now."

He then gave her a few directions and left her.

The same evening the pain returned with renewed intensity, and she passed a night of torture.

She was now convinced that she was worse than Onslowe-Bond believed.

She passed a restless night in pain and fear.

When the doctor came next morning he took a different view. He was more serious.

"Doctor," she said, "I want you to tell me exactly what the matter is. You know that I don't enjoy being ill. I take no Bayswater view of illness. I don't think it's smart. But if I am in for an illness I want to rely on you to let me know exactly what is occurring."

"Yes, yes, my dear lady," he said. "I understand your character; your character has not changed much

since the old 'Gwendolen' day, has it? You were always a favourite patient of mine."

A grim smile played round her lips.

"I don't like that sort of popularity."

"As a matter of fact," he said, "you've got some slight internal inflammation."

Then he gave her orders and prescriptions.

"Although you will be only laid up for a few days, you must have a trained nurse."

In response to the look of alarm in her eyes, he assured her that he always advised a nurse, even for the slightest ailment. A nurse was so useful and such a comfort; no maid could do as well as she, and she must not spend another night alone.

"I shall come back," he said, "early this afternoon."

A few hours later he returned.

"Mrs. Ainslie," said he, "I've brought with me Sir Dibley Niall. Mind you, I daresay I'm wasting your money, but that's hardly a matter for consideration. It will be satisfactory for you, I am sure, to have the best man."

"Oh, how right you are!" she exclaimed. "And he's the best man, is he?"

"Beyond all doubt."

Niall, a benevolent old man, intensely clean, immediately found favour in her sight. Obviously he was a man of brain. Plainly, also, Bond had given him a description of the patient's temperament.

The two men seemed to regard her less as an invalid than as a collaborator. They tried various tests, and then Niall pronounced that she was very ill, whether with peritonitis or appendicitis was not yet clear.

In spite of the terror of the blow, the pale lips framed a smile:

"I suppose it isn't possible that I could have both, is it?"

The specialist patted her hand, and assured her that it was not likely.

For some minutes they left her alone.

Then Bond returned.

She shivered at the gravity of his face.

"Whatever it is," she said, "I look to you to tell me."

Bond sat down by the side of her bed. He told her the exact name of the illness. It was more dangerous than appendicitis, more painful than peritonitis. So long was the name that it was with difficulty the doctor restrained his professional appreciation of the word.

"Will the illness be as long as the name?" she asked.

"One can't exactly say how long, my dear Mrs. Ainslie. All depends upon the constitution, nursing, and so on. Cases vary."

"But it's possible to tell me the longest time it takes to get through it. Mind, I'm going to get through it," she said, "but I want to know the absolute worst."

He thought for a moment, and then answered:

"Five or six months. You mustn't put your foot to the ground for four months. You may be in the drawing-room by—well, never mind by when. But we're going to fight this, you and I. You've got your youth and your strength on your side. And you may rely upon me. I will do everything I can—"

"You're keeping something back," she said.

Slowly he spoke:

"I've known cases that were cured in six months—without an operation. Keep your courage up. You're a plucky young woman; that I know."

She shut her eyes, and her bosom heaved.

"Thank you for telling me," she murmured.

Her heart sank.

"Oh, Richard, Richard!" she thought. She breathed a desire that was almost a prayer that he would come to her. Then she said:

"I realise that I have practically been sentenced to six months' imprisonment. I'm not a coward, doctor; but there are certain things that you know nothing about which make this isolation almost unendurable. Perhaps I had better tell you."

He pressed her hand reassuringly.

"I knew you when you were a child."

"I am in love—madly in love! Without him it doesn't matter to me whether I recover or not. I would sooner die. Don't think me a fool. I'm so weak, I'm going to cry. We've had some sort"—the words came almost unnaturally through her sobs—"we've had some sort of trouble, and I *must* see him. But I can't get him to come to me."

"If he knows you're ill," said the doctor, consolingly, "surely he will come!"

"You don't know him," she answered through her sobs. "He's a very strange man. That's why—perhaps—I don't know—I love him! But you'll always remember, when the worst comes to the worst, that I place him first, that I want him! That he is before my life. And if I get very weak, and I tell you anything more about him, if I ask you to rush to the Temple and bring him to me, swear to me you'll do it!"

He could not resist the pleading in her eyes.

By sheer self-control the flow of tears had ceased.

"You may rely on me absolutely, of course, Gwendolen."

"Now then," she said, with a great effort, "about an operation. Do you think it will be necessary?"

"We—hope not. But it's impossible to say just yet. Unless some unforeseen symptoms develop, we hope not. Keep quiet. Don't worry. The nurse will be here to-night."

Then he left.

As soon as he had gone she sent Leah to Wilfred's bedroom for a medical dictionary, and looked up the name of her illness. It was an extremely complicated malady, inflammation caused by chill. It appeared to be rarely cured, except in cases when it took a form that needed an operation. In these cases the illness was longer, but was sometimes cured. The cases in which the patients recovered without one were attributed to remarkable vitality and intense care. Apparently any sudden movement might be attended with the gravest results.

She dropped the book on the bed, and lay for a long time in a state of coma, staring at the wall.

Oh, if only Richard would come to her he would give her courage!

A terrible foreboding seized her. Although she did not believe that she was doomed, yet she dared not look forward. For some time she remained comatose, and was only aroused from her torpor by the arrival of the nurse, a pretty girl of about twenty-five, who looked like the advertisement of a nurse offering patent food to complete strangers. She had an oval face and large blue eyes.

It was nine o'clock, and she was not yet in uniform. Apparently she had been dining out, and had not expected to be sent for. She brought into the sick room the atmosphere of the small restaurant to which she had been taken by a medical student.

She was flushed, and seemed nervous, fussy, and excited. She asked Leah for a good many things, only occasionally speaking to Gwendolen.

Nurse Williams then went out of the room and returned dressed in her uniform, grey in colour and very becoming.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

NURSES

GWENDOLEN, in a low voice, told her what was said to be the matter.

The nurse only answered:

"There, there. Don't talk, Mrs. Ainslie," and was quite absent-minded; the only interest she took was that of looking at her face in the mirror. Her manner was marked by a complete lack of womanly sympathy and interest.

During the first night by the patient's bedside she answered sharply anything Gwendolen asked her. Clearly she had a snappish temper.

But a great change came over her the next morning when the doctors arrived. In their presence she seemed full of kindness and devotion. She belonged to a type of nurse that is not uncommon. Before doctors these nurses are all sweetness and sympathy, and deceive them into the belief that this is their normal condition when in the company of their patients. Therefore it is that medical men sometimes form an entirely inaccurate view of the characters of the nurses they recommend.

Gwendolen's pain now was terrible.

She asked the specialist if nothing could be done to relieve it.

He shook his head.

"I'm afraid not," he said. "Any medicines that reduce pain and fever for the moment would put us out in our judgment. The reduction of the pain would vary

the symptoms." Therefore she would have to endure it.

In a few days she found the nurse unbearable. For hours she would sit admiring herself, and telling Gwendolen about her father, who, she stated, was a *Colonel in the Navy*, and about the lovely flowers in his garden. It appeared that she was a lady who had come down in the world; she told of the many offers of marriage she had received and refused. Her vanity was colossal; though, indeed, there was some excuse for it, as she was a really pretty woman. Her prettiness was particularly galling to Gwendolen in contrast to her heartlessness.

And still no word from Richard.

One day she told Onslowe-Bond that she wished to see him alone, and told him that nurse Williams got on her nerves.

The doctor seemed much surprised, as he considered that she had such a "soothing manner;" and, indeed, in his presence her manner was all that could be desired.

But Gwendolen felt that she was actually jealous of her—that she resented the fact that Onslowe-Bond took more interest in the patient than in the nurse.

When the doctor had conveyed to her the knowledge that she was antipathetic to Gwendolen, she was actually rude, shrewish, and sulky; and it was indeed with relief that Gwendolen heard her mutter a sullen "Good-bye."

The second nurse was, she felt immediately, a better trained one, quicker and cleaner. She made less demonstration of keeping quiet, and did not say "Hush!" every moment; but she had a quiet, cat-like, capable way that was more comforting. She wore a blue uniform, had a stumpy figure, and slight claims to good looks. But she was an inveterate gossip and scandal-monger. She said anything that came into her head without the slightest scruple, and she also suffered from a vindictive

temper. Every evening Gwendolen's temperature went up to 103, and her most miserable moments were early in the morning.

The nurse, sleepy and cross, was never in a good humour, and did all she had to do, as it were, under protest.

Her great joy and excitement—as it is for most nurses—was the visit of the doctor, for which she made the most elaborate toilet preparations after a very hurried and scamped preparation of Gwendolen.

When he had gone, she generally repeated several times: "He said, 'Quite right, nurse.' Fancy, he remarked how well I was looking. Who could look well after being up all night?" And so forth.

Nurse Ellis had a habit of saying, "Oh, you'll get all right," at one moment, and at another assuring Gwendolen that she saw "death in her face" as soon as she came in, but Gwendolen was not to tell the doctor she said so.

Towards the end of the fortnight she began to see it herself. To look at her reflection in the hand-glass by the side of the bed brought tears. Her eyes were almost a death-warrant; her face had shrunk to nothing. It was a white mask with huge eyes staring from it.

One day, which was just before the crisis she believed would be her last, she made her will.

To Onslowe-Bond she said:

"I want you to go down to the Temple, to Essex Court. I want you to find Mr. Richard Meyville. I want you to tell him that I am—dying; that I can't die without seeing him. You must bring him back to me at once."

He promised.

In an hour's time Leah announced Dr. Onslowe-Bond.

Instantly Gwendolen raised herself on her pillow in expectation. There was a dash of colour on either cheek.

Then when Bond entered the room, and she saw that there was no one accompanying him, she sank back prostrate.

"Why didn't he come? Did you see him?"

"I saw him in court. I had two words with him."

"And what did he say?"

The doctor hesitated to answer.

"I'm afraid I bring you bad news. He said he was too busy."

"Was that all?"

"That was all."

"Did you tell him I was dying?"

"I told him you were very dangerously ill."

"And that's all he said?"

"That's all he said. But I think he felt the shock very much."

"Are men," she cried, fiercely indignant, "as cruel as that?"

The rest was lost in sobs and tears.

Tears stood in the eyes of the kind-hearted doctor. Richard's behaviour seemed to him incredible—brutal to the last degree. That evening he found out his private address and called upon him.

Richard rose from a sofa upon which he had been lying, wan and haggard.

Dr. Bond thought he looked almost as ill as Gwendolen.

"I quite understand your coming, Dr. Bond, and I quite understand how you must regard me. But there are matters which it would be idle to explain to you. Tell me—tell me about Mrs. Ainslie."

Bond told him that the patient was dangerously ill, but that he, personally, believed she would recover.

Richard shook his head sadly.

Neither by word nor by look did he convey any hope that she would recover. And yet he was clearly, intensely anxious as to her condition. He put many questions as to the way in which she suffered and the way she bore her pain.

The doctor did not understand the character of this eminent advocate. Beloved by a beautiful woman, obviously in love with a beautiful woman, why, in Heaven's name, was the man so cruel? Why, if he were suffering so acutely at the knowledge of her peril, why did he not rush to her side?

Now Richard had just written a letter to Tufnell, in which he stated that all was over between Mrs. Ainslie and himself; that he would never see her again.

"Doctor," he said, "I will come to Mrs. Ainslie if she is dying—but only if she is dying. This is absolutely final. I can explain nothing to you. Don't you see what I am—a complete wreck? You may guess how I'm suffering. No, I don't think you can guess how I'm suffering. I didn't know till now that there existed such pain."

To terminate the interview, he added, in a broken voice:

"Thank you—thank you very much for all you are doing—for Gwendolen."

When the doctor had gone, Richard fell on the sofa; his whole body quivered.

Gwendolen's night nurse was scarcely more congenial than Nurse Ellis.

Nurse Stewart, a heavy, almost horse-faced, woman, big of bone, heavy of movement, and wearing *pince-nez*, spoke with a Scotch accent, a hideous, harsh, Scotch accent.

She seemed to take a pleasure in irritating the patient.

She declined to tell Gwendolen her temperature when she had taken it, having pretended to Bond that it only made her nervous. Still, Gwendolen could guess it almost exactly, having noted her sensations on those occasions when she had been told it. It reached 103 every evening, an exhausting condition. It was like being physically mad whilst having one's mental capacity clear. The nerves and pulses were out of control, but her powers of thought were normal. Of course, she was not as yet delirious, but the hours passed so slowly that she was always asking Nurse Stewart what time it was. At last she had a little clock placed where she could look at it, and that was a great comfort, though before long even that was placed out of her sight.

Sometimes she thought an hour had passed, and when she found it was only a quarter of an hour she burst into tears. She always counted the minutes until she should see the doctors again, thinking that they would bring her relief or encouragement.

Bond tried endless drugs to relieve her pain, but without success. Occasionally a dose of phenacetin would mend matters for half an hour, but soon that was forbidden, as it decreased the action of the heart.

She was neither allowed nor could she take nourishment, except a little milk or beef-tea. This part of her illness was terribly long and dreary. At night she seldom slept for more than ten minutes at a time, and woke up always in greater pain.

But the anguish of her body was as nothing compared to the misery that Richard's silence caused her.

Why had he never answered her letters? There were moments when she was seized with an insane desire to rush down to the library and telephone for him. Her own telephone at her bedside had, of course, been dis-

connected. But she felt that if she could once get into communication with him he could not resist her passionate appeal. If he could hear her voice, would it not recall to him the hours, the days of perfect bliss that they had passed together?

The early mornings were horrible, for she was always awake before the nurse was ready, and was told "to keep quiet" and "go to sleep again." But the function of sleep was exhausted. The nurse must have known that there was in her no more power of sleep.

She greeted seven with relative delight, for then she was allowed a little tea, and, at eight, her letters.

How she looked forward to those letters! They were her one support of interest. Letters that would not usually have interested her, pleased her; she welcomed even bills. The turn of a phrase, the news in a letter, the quiet sympathy contained in some of them gave her the greatest pleasure.

She also took keen interest in the cards and inquiries she received. She mentally determined that if she ever recovered she would never omit to write or to inquire or to send flowers to anyone who was ill. Oh, the joy of receiving flowers! If only a bunch of violets had come from Richard, she felt that she would breathe strength from their perfume.

A great many flowers came, but she was not allowed to keep them in her room. They were always sent downstairs when she had seen them, and it pleased her to hear that the drawing-room looked like a garden of flowers. It gave her delight, pride and delight, to know that they were seen by the more intimate visitors who called.

At length the pain became so intolerable that she hardly had a moment's respite, and she saw that the doctors were anxious.

They called in another specialist, a man who was the greatest authority in England on the subject, and whose attention it was a difficult task to obtain. He rarely saw any patients except Royalty.

His arrival was a great event in the sick-room. The preparations of the nurses so that they should look their best were more than elaborate. Obviously the nurses took pride in her having three doctors, and it seemed to them it was a great credit to be nursing in so dangerous and important a case.

Yet they did not seem to consider her appearance very much, nor did they spare time to give her courage. The great doctor sat by her side and made a thorough examination; the other two did the same. Without saying a word, they went out of the room, leaving Onslow-Bond behind to cheer her up with a kind word of encouragement. He called her a plucky woman, and told her she would soon be well.

He then went out.

The suspense of waiting was terrible. It was interminable. Yet she felt resigned to the worst in a kind of helpless way. Still, she did not give up hope entirely.

Bond returned and stated:

"Well, Sir Septimus says that if certain symptoms don't appear within a week, you will gradually recover—without an operation. This is very good news. He has ordered some things that will relieve the pain, and you are to keep quiet and hope for the best."

"I am always keeping quiet," she replied plaintively.

"Yes," said the doctor, "we can't complain of you. You've done very well. But the great man has known a case like yours become absolutely cured by the rest and the warmth and the care you are having. Be brave, little lady; I have great hopes now."

He smiled reassuringly, gave some directions to the nurses, and then left.

She tried to elicit further information from Nurse Ellis.

But she was not communicative. Still, even from her she gathered that, if she had a respite for a week, there was hope.

She had the greatest dread and terror of an operation, and felt convinced that she would not survive it. She asked the nurse if she knew of anyone who had had it.

At first Nurse Ellis scouted the notion of its being required.

Now she had. "known it from the first."

Then she added that people had often recovered, but it was a long, tedious business. At best she would be in bed for six months.

On hearing this she had an outburst of terror.

What was the good of all this suffering—to end, where?

Supposing she recovered, was it likely that the man who ignored her when she was at death's door would ever take any interest in her again?

She felt that, even at the best, when she became convalescent, the sight of Richard in the street would kill her.

At last the medicines ordered by the great man produced their effect. The pain became less poignant, and she grew calmer, though the fever that night was a little higher than usual from the excitement of the day.

She overheard a conversation between the nurses when they thought she was asleep.

Nurse Ellis said:

"I knew it was a case for an operation from the first; anyone could see that. No, she won't get over it. Bless you. it's a bad case!"

Nurse Stewart replied:

"Yes, she will. You don't know anything of this sort of work. But, of course, poor thing, she will be an invalid for life, like Lady ——."

Then she lost the thread of the conversation.

She heard some murmured remarks, and then they began to chaff each other about being "mashed" on Dr. Onslowe-Bond.

CHAPTER XXXIX

"STANDETH THE REAPER"

"May it please your lordship and gentlemen of the jury——"

Scarcely were the words out of Richard's mouth than he felt his gown tugged at from behind. Looking round irritably, he found Dr. Bond at his side.

"What is it?" he whispered. But the expression on the doctor's face told him what the answer was.

"You must come at once, Mr. Meyville. Mrs. Ainslie is——"

Hastily Richard made an apology to the judge. He was unavoidably compelled to be elsewhere. His junior would open the case for the defendant.

The judge hesitated. He stared curiously at the waxen face of the barrister. He noted that his frame was swaying to and fro. He assumed that sudden illness had overtaken him. He granted the required permission.

Then Richard, with his gown fluttering behind him, strode rapidly from the court. He rushed at top speed along the crowded corridor, scarcely noticing whether Bond was following or not. Down the winding stone stairs he darted until he came to the robing-room. The doctor drew up breathlessly behind him. He flung off his wig. The attendant, a squat, brown-bearded man, took it clumsily. "I ought to congratulate you, sir," he said.

Richard turned on him.

"On what?"

The man, with astonished eyes, replied:

"Why, sir, on your having taken silk."

Richard made no reply. What did silk matter to him now?

Forestalling the slow movements of the attendant, he seized his hat. Without troubling to remove his white barrister's bands, he preceded Bond through the swing doors and out into the Strand.

The two entered the doctor's brougham. For some minutes there was silence as they went rapidly westwards. At last these words came:

"Is there—any hope?"

The doctor shook his head.

Another silence.

"We shall be in time?"

"I think so."

Richard felt his heart beating with leaden thumps. A strange sensation of guilt oppressed him. Just so did the hearts of prisoners beat in the Old Bailey when they were waiting for the jury to decide their fate. She might be dead before he reached her. He might only be in time to plant burning kisses on cold lips. Why didn't Bond speak? Bond did not speak because he felt himself in the presence of a cold, callous, unsympathetic nature, a man devoid of pity, incapable of emotion. But Richard, in his heart, felt bitter pity for Gwendolen, sinister condemnation of himself. Who was he that he should sit in judgment upon her? Who was he who, on practically no evidence at all, no tangible evidence, at least, should sentence her to a doom which was, perhaps, a death sentence?

An entire reaction possessed him as the brougham passed between the jingling motor-omnibuses, and the

chaffing cabmen. The comedy of life was going on around him, and he, if he were yet in time, would be playing the greatest tragedy of life. Self-condemnation held him by the throat. Here was a woman, a pearl among women, who had made him what he was, what he was proud to be—that he frankly admitted—and she, dying, perhaps through him. Supposing she were guilty? Hers was a crime that a lover should surely forgive. Any sacrifice of honour that a woman makes for a man she loves is held to bind him closer to her. If a woman has given her honour to him, that man, by every code of both man and woman's honour, is tied for ever to her by the bond of her shame. She had given more than her honour. And he had cast her aside, and left her to die in misery, a solitary death.

He! Because, forsooth, he had detected an action indicative of guilt, had treated her as a murderess.

He! What was he himself? His action in the affair of Billy Brinstable made him, in the eyes of the law, an accessory before the fact, and therefore guilty of murder. If Gwendolen had actually poisoned her husband, and if he knew that she had poisoned her husband, his conduct was legally that of an accessory after the fact, scarcely less guilty than the murderess herself.

He, in his heart of hearts, though the law condemned him not at all, was the murderer of Gwendolen.

Fool! fool! that he had been! Why did he not recognise the great law of life that love is the greatest of all laws, that infidelity is the greatest of all moral crimes. Life had offered him everything, Life had given him most things. But for his hideous behaviour to Gwendolen, his might have been a splendid career; rich in happiness, and love, and triumph. He, a King's Counsel, married to the woman he loved. Shame at his conduct, indigna-

tion at himself cut his reflections short. The vision of the woman lying on the bed brought tears into his eyes.

With a trembling voice, as the brougham turned into Green Street, he asked:

"Is she in pain?"

"Not now," was the answer.

Quickly he looked at the sphinx-like doctor sitting by his side. What did those words mean? Was she now, even now, beyond the reach of pain?

Dr. Bond's head was turned away.

The sound of the wheels ceased as the brougham jolted on the dirty yellow straw and drew up at the house.

Instantly the door opened, and Richard rushed in.

He was conscious of the sound of voices, women's voices, in the dining-room.

Flinging his hat on the rack, he ran up the stairs, Bond close at his heels. Instinctively he put his hand on the knob of Gwendolen's door. The doctor motioned him aside, passed by him, and very slowly and deliberately opened the door of—Wilfred's room.

"She has been moved here," he said as he entered. "Wait a minute."

Behind the half-shut door Richard stood in an agony of apprehension.

So they had moved her into Wilfred's room to die. The door would open, and he would see her in her last moments, lying on that bed on which from that very spot he had seen her husband in his last moments.

"No, no, it can't be!" he said to himself, through tightly clenched teeth. If she really had killed him, she would never have allowed herself to be taken to his bed to die.

Slowly the door opened, and the grave face of the doctor gave him permission to enter. Though the

doctor spoke no word, Richard knew he was not too late. As he went into the room, he heard the rustle of skirts at another door.

Then Bond went out.

They were left alone.

In the dim, pale light he saw her. Her face was a white spot almost hidden by her heavy, silken hair. Out of her face shone her wonderful eyes, more beautiful than they had ever been, in contrast to the cold pallor of her face.

A great gasp came into his throat.

Suddenly he rushed forward:

"My darling! My darling! My darling!"

Her eyes were fixed upon him; her pale lips made a feeble movement.

On the white satin coverlet lay a white hand, almost transparent, with blue veins standing out.

"Speak to me, speak to me!" he pleaded.

She smiled; a feeble, apathetic smile, that he strove to translate into a smile of forgiveness, rippled from her lips. Then, with a great effort, she whispered to him:

"Oh, my Richard! Oh, my Richard! Tell me that you love me—before I go!"

He covered the poor little cold hands with kisses on which fell tears.

"I love you more than ever, my darling. I'm a brute, and I know it. You must not leave me now. It's too cruel, too cruel!"

A spasm as of surrender shook her body, and her eyes closed. In the silence of the room he knelt down as one only kneels at a shrine or at a death-bed. The perfume of the red and white roses filled the room. Semi-consciously he knew that the room was a bower of roses. He understood that, when no power on earth could ward

off death, her room was filled with the flowers of her friends, and—there was not a single flower that had come from him.

Passionately he kissed her hand again, not knowing whether she felt or no.

Then, to his great joy, the eyes opened again, and, miracle of miracles, she spoke.

Her voice seemed a little stronger now. Evidently she had nerved herself for a great effort, so that in her last message her lips should be under control of her brain.

"I have made my will, darling."

He grasped her hand, as though to compel her to avoid the topic. For that one moment, at least, he was not an egotist.

But firmly she continued: "I have left you everything, dearest. I hope you will be happy."

"Happy!" he echoed hopelessly.

"Yes, very happy," she answered. "Let there be always roses—when there can be roses—over my grave. Roses scarlet and white."

Her lips broke into a smile of complete contentment. Her other hand beckoned to him. She had not the strength to draw him towards her.

He bent over her, his face only a few inches from hers, the face of a man, who should be great, peering into the face of a woman who had achieved his greatness.

Whether the music was of this earth or not he scarcely knew. It was soft and sweet and miraculous:

*"Here in my Garden of Roses
Roses are scarlet and white."*

Then the song ceased.

By the movement of her lips he followed the words.

Just as clearly as she, when in the triumph of her beauty, her health, and her happiness had sung the song, just so clearly did he hear the words:

*"His scythe shall reap no harvest
Sown in the fields of green
The reaper hath marked for his reaping
My Lady Gwendolen."*

The lips fluttered like butterflies' wings, and then were still.

He threw himself upon her in a paroxysm of fear.

"Come back to me, oh, my darling! Can't my lips bring you back from death? Speak to me, Gwendolen, speak to me! You can't leave me alone like this!"

But the lips were closed and the eyes were open.
And he knew.

CHAPTER XL

THE SUMMING-UP

HARDLY heeding the words of his manservant, Richard staggered into the sitting-room of his flat.

With glassy eyes he gazed vaguely at his brother, who was sitting in a chair waiting for him. Montague was the last man he would have desired to see at such a time.

He flung himself into a chair. His haggard appearance aroused even the eminent actor out of self-absorption.

"Dick, you're looking ill. Have a whisky-and-soda; I've just had one."

"Brandy."

Montague poured him out a quantity.

"More!"

Richard drank down half a tumblerful. The glass dropped to the floor.

"What's the matter?"

Richard did not answer.

Montague pulled out his watch.

"I've been waiting for you twenty minutes. I must be off at once. But I want to speak to you seriously."

The other opened his half-closed eyes.

"Yes?"

"I am in a very awkward position, Dick. Something must be done, and I don't know what to do. Are you listening?"

"I'm listening."

"This is the turning point of my career." He shrugged his shoulders and added, with a half-cynical laugh.

"But I've no money to turn with. My backers are sick of going on. We have been losing money for a long time. Still, if I can tide over things now, I've got the most splendid advertisement any actor ever had. What do you think I've done?" he continued proudly.

Richard hazarded no guess.

"This morning I was secretly married to Lady Pamela l'Estocq."

Richard's eyelids blinked; he displayed no emotion. He was so deeply sunk in sorrow that he scarcely realised the presence of his brother.

"Do you understand what that means?" asked Montague, drawing himself to his full height and walking up and down the room. "I have married the daughter of a peer. No other actor has ever done that. Numbers of actresses have married peers. But I am the first actor to marry a peer's daughter. I shall certainly get my knight-hood." Then he stood, looking down at his brother's prostrate form. "If I can't get ten thousand pounds this week I shall be turned neck and crop out of my theatre."

Richard brought his mind back from the bedside of Gwendolen, and looked up at Montague.

"I am very sorry," he answered.

Montague persisted.

"It would be a very good investment, you see, because the next piece is sure to be a success. My marriage is bound to be an excellent advertisement. Whether Lashbridge gives his consent or not, it is sure to boom the piece. And I want you to use your influence with Lashbridge to get his consent. Now, what do you say, Dick? Surely you know of somebody who would like to back me? Some of your clients?"

With a weary movement of the hand, which amounted

almost to motioning his brother towards the door, Richard replied:

"I know of nobody."

Montague argued:

"Think, think, think, Dick! Pull yourself together. You're the most absent-minded man I ever knew. Why, you've come from the Law Courts in your bands!"

"I can't think, Montague, of anything. At least, I've got something else to think of. This is not the moment for me to raise money for masquerades."

The actor's presence hurt him hideously, and he rose from the sofa as though to end the interview.

But Montague was not to be denied. He put his hand on Richard's shoulder.

"Dick, you don't know the worst. A lot of money that was lost over my last piece was my mother's—our mother's. She can't afford to lose it."

Bitterly Richard answered:

"You should have thought of that before you gave her the opportunity. But she shall not lose it," he went on. "I will refund whatever she has lost."

"That is very good of you, Dick—very noble. But, for the sake of the family, I assume you will not allow me to be turned out of my theatre. Look at the ignominy of it! It would be the end of me. I should be driven into the provinces. And you know I have never been appreciated properly in the provinces or in America. I am essentially a fashionable actor. I thought, perhaps, that Mrs. Ainslie might be willing—might—"

With a great effort Richard compelled himself to say in a low voice:

"Mrs. Ainslie is dead!"

Here was the final blow to Montague's hopes. In the presence of this extraordinary calamity the brothers

became brothers. The theatrical in both their natures was swept away.

Montague took his brother by the hand. For a minute neither spoke.

Richard felt an overmastering desire to unbosom himself. The pent-up anguish of the last few days demanded expression. To whom could he unbosom himself—to whom could he confess—if not his brother?

Slowly he told him the story of the tragedy. Though occasionally stifled by his sobs, he described how impetuously, on the flimsiest of evidence——

He described the agony that would haunt him throughout his life.

When he had finished, his eyes were dry of tears, but his face was very grey.

The actor had listened spellbound.

“A very strange story,” he reflected. “Pity it wouldn’t make a play!”

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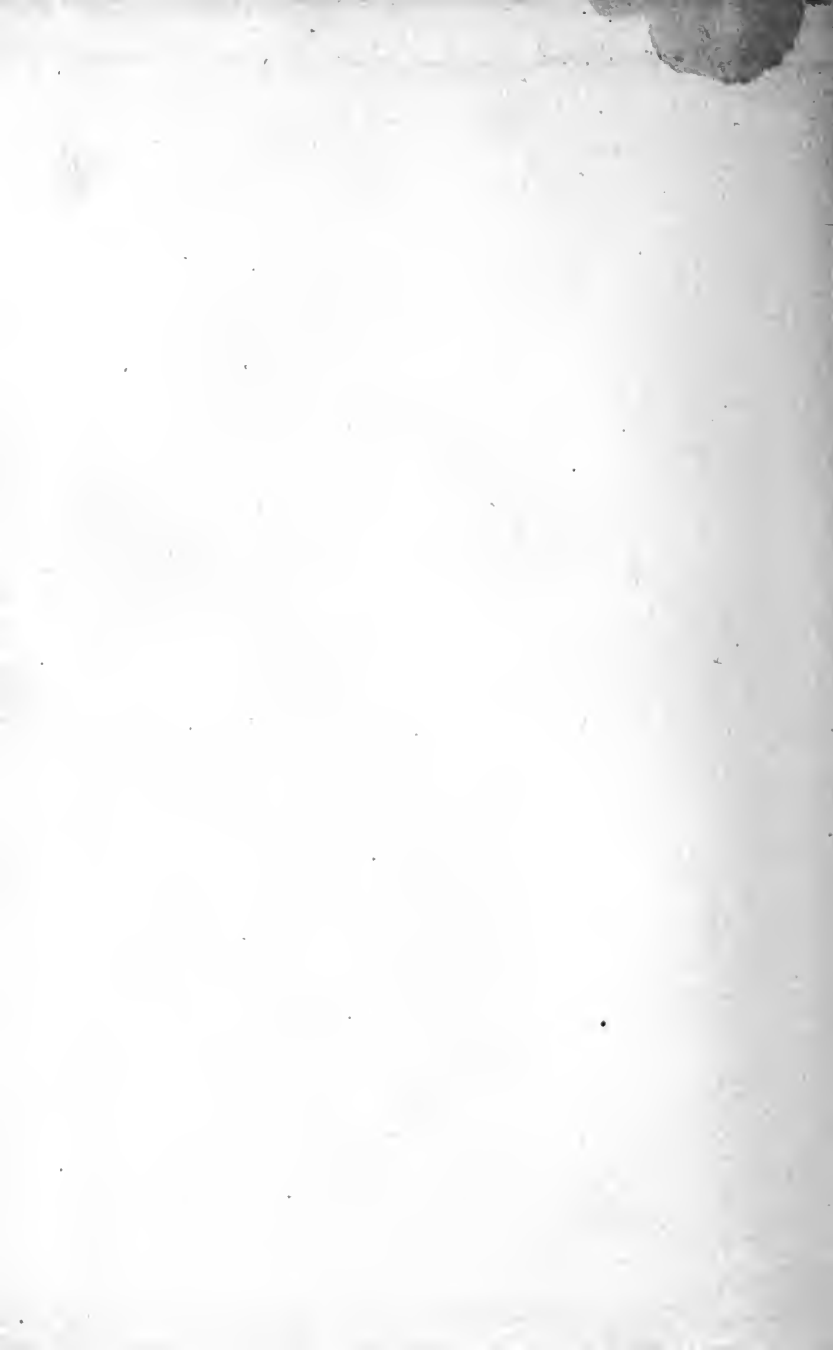
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